TRADITION AND CREATIVITY

Essays on Oriya Literature

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Jatindra Mohan Mohanty, who retired as Professor of English, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, writes frequently in English and Oriya, and is acknowledged as a foremost literary critic in Oriya literature. He was formerly member of the Executive Board, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi ; member of the Advisory Bodies of Central Institute of Indian Languages and Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages ; member ; U.G.C. Panel on English and Foreign Languages. His other books in English related to Oriya language and literature are – **There Where Trees Flower** (1987), **Into Another Intensity** (1989), **Madhusudan Rao** (1996), **Along the Stream** (1999). and **Land Beautiful, On Orissan Culture** (Ed.) (2001). His **Bibliography of Indian Literature in English Translation** was published by CIIL, in 1984.

[Translations from Oriya into English, both in prose and poetry, incorporated in the texts, unless otherwise stated, have all been done by the present writer.]

For

P.T. Rajasekharan
and
Sophie,
in love and admiration

Jatin

PREFACE

'**Tradition and Creativity**'contains 17 essays written on different occasions on different aspects of Oriya literature. Oriya language is not only one of the major languages of India, but its literature is one of the richest and most ancient, that has registered a continuous growth and development for the last about 600 years, and particularly for the last about 130 years, it has grown at par with other Indian literatures as a direct product of Western education, on the whole a complete and multifaceted growth. So also its postIndependence literature shares its many dimensions and visions with other postIndependence Indian literatures and contributes to its total mosaic substantially. The essays of **Tradition and Creativity** have two major purposes. First, they focus on the rich complexity of a literature that has grown up through multiple channels during the last 600 years, and secondly, and probably more importantly, they project its ambiences and directions in the modern and post–Independence periods.

There are two critical surveys. One relates to modern period, from Radhanath Roy till today, a period of about 130 years, a continuous change in approach, understanding and attitudes, a wonderful growth and flowering of a new literature as a whole. The second survey relates to an extremely relevant area, about women writers, about how they slowly and inevitably made a mark in the total growth of the literature, and how in the post–Independence period, both numerically and otherwise, they have come to register a very important and major presence, which incidentally, it may be pointed out, is the first comprehensive critical survey of women writers in Orissa.

Four essays expose some fundamental aspects of ancient literature, relating to the Mahabharat, the Ramayan, and the worship of Mother Goddess on the one hand, and on the other to the evolution of religious perception, one of the strongest trends in ancient Oriya literature, a trend that involved almost all important poets, beginning from Sarala Das (15th century) to Bhima Bhoi (later 19th), As ancient Oriya literature, till mid-nineteenth century, was mostly in poetry, the essays suggest some basic frame and essential strength.

Three essays, related to nature, humour, and nationalism describe some continuing preoccupations of the writers dating to our times, and the essay on nationalism shows how Oriya writers developed a common

solidarity with the pan-Indian sentiments of nationalism in the later 19th and early 20th century. Then three more essays fall within the ambit of comparative literature, and show the interaction of Oriya writers, first with Vaishnavism, then with Iswarchandra Vidyasagar and lastly with T.S. Eliot. These have been important influences and have given rise to new approaches at the time.

The next section contains four essays on four extremely important, and highly respected writers of the present time. One is on Gopinath Mohanty, the greatest Oriya writer of the 20th century, who wrote monumental novels and stories and was given Jnanpith award in 1974. The second is on Sachi Routroy, a considerable poet, who wrote pioneering poetry after Independence, and was also given Jnanpith award (1986). The third essay is on Manoranjan Das, the most important dramatist today in Orissa, who not only initiated New Drama in Orissa 50 years ago, but has so long sustained it as its leader. The fourth essay is on a considerable scholar, who passed away untimely, and who did the most strenuous and pioneering text-editing of ancient Oriya epic-authors single handedly, a job which is often done by a team of senior scholars elsewhere in India and abroad. All the essays bear testimony to the excellent creative and critical work that has been done in Orissa in the recent times.

The last essay, 'The Crisis of Oriya Language', is an analysis of the problems, physical, mental, and otherwise, which Oriya language is facing in the changed conditions at the end of the 20th century. In a way, these are also the problems which are being faced by other Indian languages in other parts of the country.

Oriya literature is an important component of Indian literature as a whole, and the essays of **Tradition and Creativity** try to provide a comprehensive exposition of its multiple variety and richness. An insight into Oriya literature is like an insight into Indian literature - the literature of a billion people, that in spite of its varieties, it had had a uniquely cohesive and animating growth for the last about 2000 years, where tradition and creativity have sustained each other in a rich, adroit flowering of an immensely alert creative spirit.

Jatindra Mohan Mohanty

CONTENTS

TRADITION AND CREATIVITY

Essays On Oriya Literature

I

ORIYA WOMEN WRITERS : A SURVEY

Probably the first-ever Oriya woman writer was Madhabi Dasi, who lived in late 15th and early 16th century, a Vaishnavi and a disciple of Sri Chaitanya (1485–1533). She was born in the Brahmagiri area of present Puri district, in the village Bentapur, in an established Karan family reputed for its literary and cultural pursuits. Among her brothers were such well–known persons as Sikhi Mohanty, and Roy Ramananda Pattanaik, who later became the Southern–Governor of Orissa under the Emperor Prataparudra Dev (1497–1533). She became a widow at an early age, but she rose on her own merit, acquired competence in a number of languages and composed a drama in Sanskrit entitled **Purusottam Dev Natakam**, wrote poems in Brajaboli, the mother–tongue of Sri Chaitanya, on Radha–Krishna theme, and also wrote poems of prayer (*janana* and *bhajana*) both in Oriya and Hindi. Her talents were recognised in the court and she was appointed as 'Lekhanadhikari' (in charge of writing), a rare honour for a lady at that time. One of her Oriya poems preserved so far, is a prayer to Lord Jagannath which runs as follows – "O round–eyed one / O Sri Hari, the life-giver to all / I bow to you in all humility. / O listen to me / You have saved so many people from so many dangers / O Merciful, the carrier of Saranga bow. / It will be in so many volumes if I describe you / I can't do it, ignorant as I am, Oh Lord!". Living more than 450 years age, in a male-dominated society, she was a glorious exception.

It was not until we come to late 17th and early 18th century that the next notable woman writer could be spotted. She was Brundabati Dasi, who was born in the village Malipada, near Khurdha, in the present Khurdha district, a contemporary of famous poets Upendra Bhanja and Dinakrushna Das. She belonged to a family where almost everybody was a poet, including her husband Chandrasekhar Das Mahapatra. Particularly, her son Bhima Das was a noted poet who had achieved eminence by translating Bishnupuri's **Harivakta Ratnabali** into Oriya (1691). Brundabati was much interested in studies, particularly in

Sanskrit kavyas and puranas, and was frequently participating in related discussions. It is presumed that she must have started writing early in life. But none of her early works are available today. What is available is her kavya entitled **Purnatama Chandrodaya** (The Rise of Full Moon), based on love between Radha and Krishna, the pet Vaishnav-theme. She wrote it around 1699–1700, when she was fairly advanced in age, in nine-letter metrical form, made popular by **Bhagabat** of Jagannath Das (1490–1550). In contrast to the sophisticated metrical arrangements of her contemporaries such as Upendra and Dinakrushna, she wrote in simple graceful language and dealt with simple, soft emotions - almost a legacy of earlier Vaishnava poets. It would be interesting to note her involvement in her work and her faith in Krishna almost as a member of the family – "O wise men / listen to me / He is not an outsider to me / He is my husband's friend / My Lord / I think of him as I think of my husband / And in thinking so / I leave my relatives, friends / And house and property and all people".

An equally important woman poet was 'Nisankaroy Rani' (the Queen of Nisank Roy) whose real name is not known, and who lived in the later part of the 18th century. She was the daughter of the king Basudev, ruler of Jarada, a small kingdom in Ganjam district, in southern Orissa, and was married to Gaurchandra Nisank Roy, the king of Budharsingi, another small kingdom in the same district. The marriage took place about 1788, and it is said that there was strained relationship between the husband and the wife, and when she became a widow she shifted to her father's house where she devoted her time to studies and writing. She is supposed to have written two kavyas, entitled **Padmabati Avilash** (Desires of Padmabati) and **Madhumalati Katharasa** (The Story of Madhumalati). Nisankaroy Rani was a contemporary of Kavisurya Baladev Rath, the illustrious poet of Ganjam, and she was much influenced by the *riti* style of writing, particularly by the kavyas of Upendra Bhanja, and like him she wrote on secular topics of love, with metrical structure, literary flourish and ornamentation. Thus this is how a pond is described:

> The swans float on the red border of a blue saree
> As if the earth spreads its blue clothes with grace and beauty,
> The white and red lotuses spread fragrance

The bumble bees move mistakenly in glee
The curlews and storks fly around the island
And swans and flamingos play with gallimule.

Nisankroy Rani as well as Brundabati Dasi before her, had given vent in their writings, of a serious limitation they had to face. This related to a general social stigma and intolerance against women as such, particularly taking to a creative pursuit such as writing. This had no doubt its origin in the economic subservience of the female to the male, but at the same time it was also the outcome of a general attitude about women, related to how much of freedom could be given to women in such matters – a social attitude which had continued even till few years before Independence. The result was pain and agony, as well as loneliness, helplessness and fear of unwanted talks about such women who took to writing as a life's mission. Thus Brundbati had to apologize for writing about the extramarital relationship between Radha and Krishna, though that happened to be the usual subject matter with the Vaishnava poets of the time :

I am by nature a woman without tolerance without mind,
As I sing of Krushna I am divinely inspired.
But you will say –
She is a woman of the family,
As a family–woman she can't praise an outsider.
It is not good, it does not become a family–woman.
I have not read anything,
By nature a woman, low in work,
A prisoner in the royal family
Worried, oppressed
Not knowing what to do.

and again,

A woman by nature
Poor in work
No intelligence, no studies,
I do not know how to spend my days and nights.

The agony and helplessness are both evident – an undercurrent which had hardly left women writers in Orissa.

Hindu Orissa lost its independence in 1568, consequent to which

for about 300 years, under the Moghul, Muslim, Marahatta and British rulers till the end of the 19th century, it was a time of great uncertainty, instability and insecurity for Orissa politically, economically and socially. But interestingly that was the time when Oriya literature flourished, and though there were only a few women writers in the 16th and 17th centuries, a sizeable number of them came to the front in the 18th. Though many such women had imbibed Vaishnavism and wrote on Radha–Krishna theme in general, many more did not do so. These, that is, the second group wrote on secular subject matters such as love in the family, or husband-wife relationship, and also on marriage as a sacred institution. Most of the women writers either belonged to high caste or to royal families, and the tradition of the type of poetry they wrote continued throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. These were - Krushnapriya Jemadei, Chitramali Jemadei, Nayanamali Jemadei, Monorama Jemadei, Mardharaj Jemadei, Raghunandan Nrupa Jema, Suryamoni Patamahadei, Birakeshari Rani and Indumukhi Kannya etc., all of whom belonged to the 18th century; and Khirodmalini Jema, Shibapriya Jemadei, Ratnamali Jemadei, Nilamoni Jemadei, Marakatamoni Jemadei, Rajamoni Jemadei, Mukunda Deba Rani, Ganga Devi, Mohan Kumari Devi, Bhramar Priya, Sankar Priya, and Sumati, all of whom belonged to the 19th century.

The form of poetry that was most popular with most of these ladies was 'Mangala Geeta' or Mangala songs, that is, the poems or songs written on auspicious occasions in the family or providing auspicious beginning to such occasions where generally family members get involved, which may be marriages, festivals, or even while worshipping gods and goddesses. Such songs were generally simple in content, had collective appeal, and mostly contained nothing which could be socially objectionable. Besides, poems of prayer, such as bhajanas and jananas were also written. Ganga Devi, for example, wrote **Dhupabati** (Incense–Songs) which was a prayer to Lord Jagannath, and Krushnapriya Jemadei and Suryamoni Patamahadei etc. wrote general jananas in submission to deities. Other forms were also pursued. Thus, Indumukhi Kannya wrote a *koili* poem, entitled *Baramasi Koili* (Koili for 12 months), Khirodmalini Jema a *chautisa* poem entitled, *Pranabandhu Chautisa* (Chautisa for My Heart's Dear Friend), Mohan

Kumari Devi, a narration-poem on Kartika ritual, entitled *Kartika Brata*, and Bhramarpriya *chaupadi*, that is, the song of love. Even a poem entitled *Mukunda Dev Ranikma Soka* expressing sorrow, was written by the queen of Mukunda Dev, the last Gajapati King of Khurdha (1795–1817) who was imprisoned by the British in the Barabati fort at Cuttack till his death, Similarly another queen, Birakeshari Rani, the queen of Birakeshari Dev, the Gajapati King of Khurdha (1739–1781) wrote songs of joy and sorrow indirectly related to her husband.

These constituted the majority of women writers in the 18th and 19th centuries, and almost all of them belonged to high class families, and wrote within the precincts of the family on traditional family-sentiments, where poetry-writing was considered as a leisurely activity and a cultural trait of concerned women. The excessive emphasis on Mangal songs, particularly the marriage-songs of Rama and Krishna, and on poems of prayer, was indicative of the safe approved forms these writers pursued. As against these the other group, where the women writers did not necessarily belong to high families, and had greater freedom in choosing subject, form and content, was comparatively smaller. They were all also Vaishnavites, that is, indoctrinated into Vaishnav faith at different times and wrote about it . These were Rasamayee Dasi, Harapriya Dasi, Haripriya Dasi, Kumkum Dasi, Hira Dasi, Lalita Dasi, Nanda Bai, Daibat Dei, Pila Bai, Mukutamali, Sasirekha, Rasa Bali and Radhikamoni etc. They wrote on love and romance invariably related to Krishna-theme, or to Radha–Krishna and Gopi-Krishna relationship, mostly lyrics and chautisas and chaupadis as well as such janana and bhajan which praised Krishna and his attributes. Thus Harapriya wrote *Krushna Biraha Chautisa* (Chautisa on Krishna's Pangs of Separation), Haripriya janan and bhajan, Hira chaupadi, Lalita Vaishnav songs, Nanda *Nandabai Chautisa*, Kumkum *Rukmini Chautisa,* Rasamayee *Chari Lahari* (Four Waves, on love), Mukutamali *Solapadia* (16 couplets, on love) and Rasa Bali love songs etc. Oriya Vaishnav literature had a very rich tradition, and included such important writers as Dinakrushna Das (1650–1710), Bhaktacharan Das (1729–1818), Banamali (d. 1790), Avimanyu Samantasinhar (1757–1806), Gopalkrushna (1784 –1862) and Kabisurya Baladev Rath (1789–1845). This was a major trend in Oriya literature for about 400 years,

from the 16th till 19th century, where accounts of Radha-Krishna, or exploits of Krishna, often incorporated references to Lord Jagannath of Puri, and Vaishnavism as a whole developed interesting local connotations. The Vaishnavite women writers were influenced by this tradition and contributed to this in their own ways. In fact, beginning from 1500 till about 1880, the women writers of both the groups constituted a significant stream of poetry-writing in Oriya and that too, in spite of many restraints under which they had to operate.

References have been made to Mangala songs. Invariably they were written in the frames of marriage-rituals either related to Rama or Sita or to both. Thus for example, the ritual–bath for the bridegroom before marriage :

> When the night ended the mother got up
> The jewel of Raghu family to be married,
> The pot was placed on the lotus of hundred petals
> The lamps of diamonds were lit,
> The food items were offered in a golden plate
> And the maids made ulu ulu noise and sang mangala.

Or the joy of celebration in Ayodha on the eve of Rama's marriage :

> The women in Dasaratha's family were all happy
> The Lord, the Moon of Raghu dynasty, marries tomorrow
> The noise of ulu ulu everywhere, and joy and celebration
> And sound of musical instruments and bugles and drums.
> Thus the third day passed
> And on the fourth day the ritual of milk, ...
> The celebrations all through Ayodha town
> And citizens everywhere drowned in joy and happiness.

Reversely, the similar celebrations also take place at Sita, the bride's, place. Thus, in the beginning it is the preparation of marriage–altar:

> The golden altar was washed
> A canopy was laid,
> And covering of betel-leaves
> And form and garlands of pearls,
> And women making ulu ulu noise
> And hanging golden banners everywhere.
> Seven lamps were lit

And curd, fish and pots with tender mango leaves were placed.

Similarly auspicious is the coming of Sita to the marriage pavilion:

Hundreds of Brahmins chanted the Vedas
Thousands of drums, thousands of conches
and thousands of bugles sounded,
And the whole world was filled with songs and ulu ulu.
Sita came out of the palace gracefully clothed
Surrounded by queens like swans
And maids fanning all sides....

But it is not the accounts of marriage celebrations all the time. On occasions the songs also contained sly comments, full of wit and humour. Without any references to Rama or Sita, they become reflections of prevalent social customs where men and women were married in spite of great disparity of age. Thus, a dig at the bridegroom who appears much older than the bride:

We ran to see the bridegroom,
Lo ! The old man sits hanging his head
He does not speak out of shame,
The nose hollowed and the face curved
The eyes like the inside of an empty coconut
And the eyeballs so big we're frightened.

....

The hairs on the head look white like white cloth
The teeth are loose, Oh dear !
The hairs of eyebrows stretch to the forehead
The whole body looks white like a new chalk.
I can't describe the beauty of the eyes
The nose looks like a mound of oven.

(ii)

The British administration that began in Orissa from 1803, but really came to an effective state from about the middle of the 19th century, gave rise to a new dispensation in thought and sensibility, and the emergence of a new and modern Oriya literature. This influenced women writers too, and the two important modern women writers, who emerged in the 19th century were Sulakhyna Pattnaik (1829 -

1901) and Reba Roy (1875-1957). Sulakhyna was born in an affluent family at Tigiria, a feudatory state, about 80 kms. from Cuttack, towards the west, to Dasarathi Beborta Pattnaik, an employee of the king. She was married to Nityananda Pattanaik, of Dhenkanal, another feudatory state, at a distance of about 40 kms. from Tigiria, where Mr. Pattnaik too, worked as an employee of the king. Sulakhyna's husband's family was also a well–to–do family where she came to be established as an ideal housewife, much loved and respected by the family members. Though she did not have any formal schooling, yet she was accomplished in a general way, and apart from her proficiency in cooking, she was interested in studies, particularly in ancient Oriya puranas and kavyas, and was skilled in a number of fine arts, particularly in such folk-arts and designs that were practiced in the family. Sulakhyna became a widow in 1881, at the age of 52, and for the rest 20 years of her life, she lived observing the manners and rituals of an ideal Hindu widow, deeply immersed in spirituality and devotion to god, which touched all that she wrote. In this she got significant support from her eldest son Damodar (Pattanaik) who was the chief executive officer (Dewan) of the king, and himself a noted poet and music-lover.

Sulakhyana's poems were first collected together and published from Cuttack in 1896, thanks to the efforts of Damodar. Almost all the poems thus collected were written after 1890, as the early pieces that she wrote were either not preserved or lost. Sulakhyana's book was entitled **Parijatamala** (The Garland of Parijata Flowers) and it contained 5 poems giving accounts of seasons and season's cycle, one poem on Lord Jagannath and the Lord's temple, one koili poem called *Dinabandhu Koili*, and 6 jananas. The poems were few in number, but they exhibited not only a fine skill and competence in writing, but also a remarkable involvement and sincerity of the poetic mind. First, her humility is touching:

> I am humble by nature
> Not read in any school
> How would I use paper and pen.
> As I take up a pen in hand
> My hand trembles, the pen falls.

Secondly, her poetic accounts have both power and imagination, as for

example, in the following description of spring :

The dead trees blossomed
The old haggard looks were gone,
The beauty of a new youth showed
As if wearing colourful sarees with veil.
Oh, wise men,
Look, what beauty!
With what glee the branches move in the wind.

Thirdly, her religiousness and deep faith in God, particularly in Lord Jagannath, was expressed with felicity in her poems of prayer :

Oh, the moon of the Blue hills
I am bound, crippled in illusion
Please cut my chains, Oh Banamali!
And chain me to your lotus feet
Forever, always.

Madhusudan Rao, the famous contemporary poet, wrote highly praising Sulakhyana's poems, in his preface to her book ; and also later, after her death, wrote a fine elegy on her many qualities of head and heart and referred to **Parijatamala** as 'sweet', 'fresh', 'holy', like a 'sweet spring'.

Reba Roy was a niece of Madhusudan Rao, daughter to his younger brother Jagannath Rao. She was looked after by Madhusudan from her early childhood and was indoctrinated into Brahmo Dharma by him. She had schooling at home, and from early youth she turned to be a social–activist and was motivated towards upliftment of women and woman–education, and started Orissa's firstever high school for women in 1905. She was married to Sadhu Charan Roy (1860–1898), a contemporary poet and social–activist, who unfortunately died at an early age, and Reba became a widow at the age of 22. She edited two journals, first **Pravat** (Morning), a monthly, that published poems and essays of revolutionary and reformistic content, and protested against the contemporary familial and social restrictions under which women had to live and work. Subsequently, with similar motives as well as with a view to create a group of women writers, she got engaged in editing an all-woman journal entitled **Asha** (Hope,1892). Her poems, most of which were written before 1898 (that is, the year she became a widow) were collected in a volume entitled **Anjali** (Offerings) and

was published in 1904. In 1905, her next work, a story-collection, entitled **Sakuntala** was published. It was the first such work by any Oriya woman writer and contained a number of socially motivated stories.

Anjali, published from Cuttack, contained 42 poems and was dedicated to Madhusudan Rao. As per Reba's own admission, the poems were written between her 13th and 20th year. But what was remarkable in them was what they conveyed, a complete newness and a new sensibility at par with the new poetry that was emerging in Oriya literature towards the end of the 19th century – a poetic understanding that was, in a way, radically different from that of Sulakhyana and the rest. Reba had a free spirit, but at the same time she had had a fine sense of propriety and discipline imbibed from her uncle Madhusudan. Thus the poems had freeness and joy on the one hand, and discipline and balance on the other. This is how she expresses her feelings of love, as related to two souls being tied in marriage :

In new life
In newness of youth both
Float in joy of love no end,
The eyes downcast in shyness
The hearts full of passion,
The desire to see the loved face
At least once .... (*Parinaya*, Marriage)

Or her feelings for nature, as in an account of dawn, mingled with joy and spirituality :

Oh, Dawn
You wash yourself daily in the dews of night
And the veils of dark night you open daily, slowly...
Whose songs you sing daily, oh Dawn,
In whose holy feet you give your offering
Holding young sun like a lamp in hand ? (*Usha*, Dawn)

Or in motivations of social reforms, as in *Bhai Prati Bhagini* (To the Brother from Sister) :

When that day will come
When brothers and sisters together
Will do service to humanity,

Oh brother, teach, teach that
Do not delay,
Sisters are not animals
They are human beings.

Raba's literary pursuits, as I said, died early in life, and never returned to her in a long career of rest about 60 years, though it was fruitful otherwise. Yet in spite of its short span, her's was the first modern voice, and quite endearing too, among Oriya women writers.

(iii)

Reba Roy's pioneering work provoked a number of women writers, junior to her in age, but like her acutely conscious of the changes that generally came in the social as well as mental areas at the turn of the century. Such women were, Suchitra Devi (1881 - ?), Annapurna Devi (1883 -1961), Sulochana Dei (1895-1949), Aparnna Devi (1898-1962) and Sitadebi Khadanga (1902-1983). Suchitra was born at Chanahat, near Cuttack, in an affluent Karan family, and was married to Raghabananda Das, a Government officer, who was also a writer, and whose influence on Suchitra was quite seminal. First of all she collected Oriya folk tales, and put them in a viable form in an anthology, first such work in Oriya. Her poetry-collection, entitled **Kabita Lahari** (The Waves of Poetry) was published in 1901, and became quite popular having 6 editions in quick succession.

Annapurna was born at Chikiti, in Ganjam district, and in contrast to earlier women writers whose writings were limited in number, she was the first to have substantial amount of writing, both poetry and essays, to her credit. She got married in 1900, at the age of 17, and her earliest writings date almost from that age. Though she stayed at Visakhapatnam in Andhra, where her husband worked, in the midst of Telugu-speaking people, yet her dedication to Oriya language and literature was an act of faith, and even by the time she became 21, she was already established as a poet and an essayist. She often wrote in well-known contemporary journals, such as **Sambalpur Hiteisini** (1889-1923) and **Sahakar** (1919-1952) and worked as the editor of the latter for some time. Her books include **Padyamala** (Garland of Poems, Part-I, 1904), **Padyamala** Part-II, and **Bhakti Prarthana** (Devotional Prayers)

which contained a large number of her poems; and a much-appreciated critical essay on the relative merits of Upendra Bhanja and Sarala Das (15th century) entitled, *Rajkabi Upendra O Sudramuni Sarala Das*. Her poems were remarkable for their felicity as well as for religious faith and spiritual content, almost in the tradition of Sulakhyana Devi, and she earned respect both from the young and the old. An interesting aspect which surfaced in her poems at times, by itself an indication of the contemporary social status of women, was what we have already noted in earlier women writers such as Brundabati Dasi and Nisankroy Rani – helplessness, lack of freedom and a painful admission of the fear of writing, a fear of what people may say or may not say. Thus, as in the poem *Prarthana* (Prayer) :

> See, when this illiterate woman writes a few rhymes
> What canards, what talk of disapproval !
> I write poems and I cry in wilderness,
> Is there anybody in Orissa to listen to me.

Yet Annapurna was a social-activist, worked for the unification of Oriya speaking tracts, and gave evidence before Phillip Duff Commission on States Reorganisation, in Madras.

Sulochana belonged to Bamanda, then a feudatory state in western Orissa, and a very important centre of activities related to Oriya language and literature under the patronage of the king Sir Basudeb Sudhal Dev (1850–1903) and subsequently under his son and noted writer, the king Sachidananda Tribhubana Dev (1872–1916). A great incentive was provided by **Sambalpur Hiteisini**, already referred to, a weekly magazine of news and literature, patronized by the royal court and under the competent editorship of Nilamoni Bidyaratna (1867–1924), a noted writer, where many of Sulochana's poems were published. Her books were many, which include, **Abakas Manjari** (The Blossoms of Leisure), **Padmini**, **Savitri**, **Chitta Vikas** (Soul's Improvement), **Bana Malli** (The Flowers of Wilderness) and **Ananda Lahari** (The Waves of Pleasure) etc. with contents of familial joy and pleasure as well as of devotion and spirituality.

Aparnna was born at Birabhadrapur, in Puri district, and achieved a good deal of fame as a poet, novelist and storyteller and was honoured with the title 'Kabita Kalpalata'. Her well-known kavya **Indumati** was in

the tradition of the kavyas of Radhanath Roy (1848–1908) and had equal felicity in description and use of language. Besides she had a large number of lyrical poems too, remarkable for their quality of fine imagination, emotional intensity and spiritual perception. They were collected in volumes entitled, **Kabitanjali** (The Offering of Poetry), **Baramasi** (12 Months), **Chinta** (Thought) and **Satadala** (**Hundred** Petals) etc. Then she had two novels, **Banamalati** (Wild Flower) and **Aryalalana** (Arya Women), and two collections of short stories, **Dasakumar Charita** (The Accounts of Ten Princes) and **Dasa Kumari Charita** (The Accounts of Ten Princesses). Particularly, her two story books became extremely popular. They were fictional accounts in the manner of ancient tales, related to folk culture and folk imagination, and contained exciting dramatic narratives written in simple colloquial language with strong moral content. But Aparnna excelled in poetry, where her perception as well as emotional intensity could be seen at their best, for example, in the following poem from **Satadala** (29th Petal)

Seeing your manners
I die in fear, oh Lord,
Being the Sea of Kindness
Why so cruel,
Why cover your heart with steel ?
You put me at the top of the mountain
And push me down,
You show me sweet, clear water to drink
And put a fence of thorn round it,
You sit by my side to console me
And beat me hollow cruelly,
You call me from a distance so lovingly
But you run away like a cheat.
And what remains
Is only heat of separation, oh Lord!

Sitadevi was born at Asika, in the Ganjam district, in an affluent family, and her father Harihar Panda, a man of sterling quality, was an established and respected leader of the society. Sitadevi was influenced by her father's ideals, including his social motivations. She was married at the age of 10, to Banchhanidhi Khadanga of Gopalpur Sasan,

near Sorada, in the same district. She did not have any proper schooling, but she was self-taught, first by the encouragement of her father, and laterly by the encouragement of her husband, and she read extensively in ancient and modern Oriya literature as well as in contemporary Bengali literature, particularly Bankimchandra and Tagore. She wrote poetry, fiction and drama, and in every field she made a mark. In addition, she translated Tagore's novels into Oriya, such as **Ghare Baire** and **Sesa Kabita** and wrote a memoir entitled **Jiban Smruti** (The Life's Memories). She wrote her first novel entitled **Bimata** (Step Mother) at the age of 13. Subsequently her other novels were, **Posyaputra** (Adopted Son), **Agraja** (The Elder) and **Pratyabartan** (Return) etc. The novels were well-written and entertaining, and invariably expressed feminine emotions and sentiments. Her novel **Posyaputra**, for example, is an account of a sensitive woman who struggled against adverse situations to get her identity established. The same novel also provides social motivations such as, against child-marriage etc. In fact, Sitadevi's voice was not only almost continuous, but also at times, strident, against prevailing superstitions and blind beliefs. The same spirit continued in her dramas too, where she combined the roles of a dramatist, and a producer, and highlighted the values of idealism and humanism in life, and by her own admission, got greater pleasure and joy in composing dramas than, for example, in writing novels. **Janmatithi** (Birthday) was her first full-length social play. Other plays were **Sahodara** (The Brother), **Nari** (Woman), **Posyaputra** (Step Son) that prompted **Posyaputra** novel subsequently, **Naisthika** (Orthodox), **Nispati** (The Decision), **Prachin Panthi** (Old Fashioned), **Khyudhar Pida** (The Pain of Hunger) and **Matruhina** (Motherless) etc. Every play had a special feminine touch and reflected the writer's fine, balanced personality.

Sitadevi's achievements were many. In addition to her immense creative activity, she was also quite effective organisationally. She had organized a theatre-group, 'Harihar Natyamandir', in the name of her father. Also the well-known institution, 'Krushna Singh Sahitya Parisad', of Asika, named after Krushna Singh, the famous king of Dharakot, who had translated Mahabharat into Oriya, came to be known mainly due to her efforts, for which she got financial aid from the Government of Orissa. In short, for her many activities, Sitadevi's was a household

name in Ganjam district, and as a writer she was much appreciated by the writing–community of Orissa. Yet, it is interesting to note, how acutely she was conscious of the many adversities under which a woman had to work, particularly in her early days, a situation almost at par with what Annapurna Devi had to say earlier. The following is an extract from her **Jibansmruti** – "The way the women were treated at that time, when compared, even the Jersey cows today in the rich houses fare better..... I was just like a cockroach in the darkness of the kitchen. I groped around in my restlessness only to take my shelter in the same darkness. Whatever hope and desires rose in the mind they ended in a natural death".

(iv)

It was remarkable how talented women–writers were fanning out into activities other than literary. The first instance was Reba Roy. Subsequently the tradition was continued by Annapurna first, and laterly by Sitadevi, both from Ganjam district. But such activities probably came to a fruition in two extraordinary women writers, one from Bastar, an outlying Oriya area, towards the west of Orissa, in Madhya Pradesh, (now Chattisgarh) who died at an early age of 38; and the other from Cuttack district, most of whose life was spent in Cuttack town, and who lived long, for about 82 years. They were Kuntala Kumari Sabat (1900–1938) and Sarala Devi (1904–1986).

Kuntala was born at Jagdalpur, in Bastar, where her father Daniel Sabat was a doctor and a Christian by faith. Her mother's name was Manika, and she came of a good Karan family from Athagarh. Kuntala was the eldest child. Her early years till she became 14, were spent in Burma (currently Myanmar) where her father had migrated for professional purposes. At around 1915 she returned to Khurdha, near Bhubaneswar, her ancestral place, along with her mother and brothers and sisters while her father stayed back in Burma. She was admitted to Ravenshaw Girl's High School at Cuttack, where she read for 2 years. In 1917 she appeared in Medical Entrance Test, where she stood first, joined Cuttack Medical School, where she read for 4 years and completed her medical education in 1921 (L.M.P). She took to private practice immediately which she continued till 1925, when she picked

up a Government job. Finally in 1927, she resigned from Government Service, went over to Delhi where she set up a practice, which brought her immense fame and reputation. She got married in 1928 (August), to Krushna Prasad Brahmachari, and continued her practice till 1938 (August), when she died untimely during childbirth. Apart from her great popularity as a dedicated and competent doctor, Kuntala also got eminence as a social-activist, and she was continuously associated, almost at the top level, with various movements and agitations for female emancipation as well as for freedom struggle. Her famous Presidential Address *Nari Swarajya*, on the occasion of Pan-Indian Aryan Women Conference at Barelly in 1932 (February 7 to 9), conveyed her range of thought as well as immense courage and openness of mind.

In addition to Oriya and English, Kuntla was well versed in Bengali and Hindi. Particularly in Hindi, she could speak fluently, write felicitously (she had a collection of lyrics in Hindi entitled **Baramala** and edited a number of Hindi journals – **Mahabira, Jiban, Bharati** etc.) to the extent that Jainendra Kumar, an eminent Hindi novelist, wrote a novel based on her life, entitled **Kalyani**. Kuntala excelled in poetry, though at the same time she wrote novels, and essays both in the form of addresses in the meetings and conferences as well as despatches and letters, that were published in Oriya journals. Kuntala's first published work was a book of poetry, entitled **Anjali** (Offering, 1922). Her subsequent poetical volumes mere, **Uchhwas** (Emotion, 1924), **Archana** (Worship, 1927), **Sphulinga** The Spark of Fire, 1929), **Awahan** (Challenge), **Prema Chintamoni** (The Jewel of Love, 1930), **Odiyanka Kandana** (The Tears of the Oriyas, 1926), **Gadjat Krushaka** (The Farmers of Ex-Feudatory States, 1929), and **Manikanchan**, an incomplete kavya. She had 6 novels, entitled respectively, **Bhranti** (Mistake, 1923), **Naatundi** (In Nine Mouths, 1928), Kali **Bohu** (The Dark Bride, 1925), **Raghu Arakhita** (1928), **Parasmoni** (Touchstone, 1933) and **Chitrapat** (The Painting), incomplete. The essays and despatches were not many, but they ranged over a number of issues relevant and appropriate for the times, such as, on female-emancipation, socialism, religious dogmatism, untouchability, the poverty and distress of the Oriyas, and the unification of Oriya

speaking areas etc.

Kuntala's poetry generally conformed to the major trends of the then Oriya poetry and developed strong. personal aspects related to love and mysticism, nationalistic and patriotic sentiments, compassion and sympathy for the poor and the distressed, and a bitterness of spirit at the plight of the Oriyas and particularly Oriya women. Thus **Anjali** contained songs of love and submission dedicated at the altar of the divine being; **Uchhwas** had fine flight of imagination that combined a keen sensitiveness to nature with an acute religious perception; **Archna** showed strong patriotic sentiments, particularly related to the distress and plight of Orissa; **Sphulinga** provided a spark of fire to ignite youth to excitement, confidence and work; **Awahan** like a clarion call motivated people to join Gandhiji's Satyagraha movement and to protest against the exploitation by the foreign rulers ; **Gadajat Krushak**, a story in verse, laid bare the plight of the poverty-stricken, exploited farmers of the ex-feudatory states of Orissa; **Odianka Kandana** exposed the stark reality of the distress and plight of thousands of helpless Oriya women and labourers in Calcutta and Burma; and **Prema Chintamani**, a collection of flyrics, showed the sensitive poet's agony and insecurity related to love and love-relationship, which was both personal and more than personal.

Some examples would be pertinent. Thus this is how she feels at the coming of a new dawn (*Nabina Prate,* New Dawn):

> This new life this auspicious new dawn
> Whose sweet song enraptures my mind.
> My mind dies in shyness
> My heart listens as if lost
> And sweetness vibrates in my memory secretly.
> This new life this auspicious new dawn –
> The veena tunes in air and sky
> The echoes in the forest win my heart
> And the sweet song enraptures my mind.

Or, the feeling for love (*Prema Kare Kimpa*, Why I Love)

> Why should I be proud that I love
> It's my duty to love,
> Oh, my friend, you have given me rights to love

And this poor being is so grateful to you.

Or, the feeling of despair (*Se Ki Bujhe*, Does he Understand):

Does he understand my heart's agony,
Does he understand my pain ?
Does he understand my painful sighs
Does he understand my heart ?
Where is he ? In which country ?
I search for him daily, day and night
Inside and outside
He never comes, never comes near.

Or, differently a strident call to the youth to rise (*Tarunar Abahan*, Invoking the Youth):

Let not my tongue talk of despair
Let not my nation hear it,
Let one and half crore souls rise in resurgence
Let them rise in new strength and power.

Similar sentiments also continued in Kuntala's novels. Basically they portrayed the contemporary society – social habits and manners, social conservatism and smallness, the plight of women, particularly of widows, and the evil of child–marriage. Her description in each case was graphic, and her attitudes were normally reformistic and moralistic and motivated by nationalistic and idealistic sentiments. Thus **Kali Bohu**, an account of child-widow, is a bitter castigation of the social ostracism, meanness and conservatism ; and **Parasamani**, an account of a woman, shows how a family without compassion, sympathy and understanding is without the vitality of life, and is reduced to a situation where man cannot live as a wholesome being ; and **Raghu Arakhita**, shows the travails of a man as he grows up, and records how the Western education and manners have eaten into the entails of our life and living and reduced us as fake imitations of the West. Kuntala's awareness of contemporary life was sharp and pointed. She knew of its many pitfalls, and her attitude was bitter and satirical. But she had also compassion, a desire how best the things can change for better, and a will that they should change. Kuntala's poetry, novels and essays were creative expressions of her desires, which she supplemented by her many social and cultural activities. A remarkable

personality, Kuntala was a beacon star for Oriya women writers as a whole.

Sarala belonged to a family of freedom fighters in Cuttack district, her brother being Nityananda Kanungo (1900–1988), well–known Congress leader, one time M.P., Central Minister, and Governor of Gujrat. She was married to Bhagirathi Mahapatra (1892 – 1975), also a well–known freedom fighter and leader, one time Chairman of Cuttack Municipality, a Member of Indian Constituent Assembly and also an M.P. Sarala too, was actively engaged in political activities. In 1921 she participated in the Non–Co-operation movement and courted arrest. She was the first-ever woman member from Orissa in the All India Congress Committee. In 1936, she was elected to Orissa Legislative Assembly from Cuttack. Besides, she had been in various other organizations on her own merit, such as, All India Women's Conference, Central Social Welfare Board, and the Senate of Utkal University etc. In fact, Sarala had always been an important and front–ranking social and political activist, and the first among Oriya women writers to be so.

Sarala's earliest attempts at writing was a novel entitled **Basanti** (1931) where in fact, she was a co-writer along with 8 others, including five women. **Basanti** was a strong challenge against the contemporary social and religious superstitions that kept women as the subservient members of the society, and Basanti, the heroin (whose name gave the title to the novel), was projected as a strong feminist character, who maintained and achieved parity between men and women in society. Sarala's involvement with the spirit of the novel was a part of her total involvement with such ideas at the time. But Sarala's creative talent did not continue for long in novel. It came to be better manifested in essays and criticism. In 1939 she got Utkal Sahitya Samaj award for her literary essay on Kuntala's poetry entitled, *Kuntala Kumarinka Kavi Prativa*. Her other critical essays include such well–known pieces as *Gopalkrushna Prativa,* a discussion on the poetry of Gopalkrushna, and *Sarala Mahabharatare Nari Charitra*, an account of women characters In Sarala Das's **Mahabharat**, a fine, seminal essay. Her essays were full of new ideas, new thoughts, particularly motivated towards the woman's point of view– woman as a responsible being in the society

capable of fighting against the disintegrating factors of life, towards building up a benign, graceful and cohesive structure of living both for contemporary men and women. Her books were many, including one–acts and dramas. Some such books were, **Biswa Biplabini** (The Revolutionary Women of the World), **Narir Dabi** (The Claims of Women), **Nari Jagat** (The World of Women), **Bharatiya Mahila Prasanga** (About Indian Women), **Odia Bohu** (The Oriya Daughter–in–Law), **Prabandha Piyusa** (The Honey of Essay) and a biography of Roy Ramananda, the only book so far on the most famous administrator–devotee of Sri Chaitanya.

Sarala had always her own point of view, and invariably she prodded others to think and ruminate. It would be difficult to catch her range of thought, particularly on and related to women, the first and probably the boldest voice of feminism in modern Oriya literature, where action and thought were integrated in a powerful personality. A few quotations would be probably apt and appropriate. For example, the following is an extract from her essay *Satitwar Naba Darsana* (Chastity : A New Outlook) where she speaks of the appropriate values of womanly chastity :

> A question is raised about womanly chastity that it originates from a feudal and capitalist conservative social mind. Women have been trained in such superstitions as, after life, heaven, hell, and purity and impurity, and to safeguard the community interest, family faithfulness and genealogical purity. Women have been put in the traps of marriage and have been made the slaves of male members; and as a woman's simple, gullible mind is not free of superstitions she has accepted chastity as well as the domination of husband as her due share and dharma. But in reality chastity has no meaning. It is only fear and superstition that have given rise to such ideas. In the woman's path of self development the so called sexual purity is a great danger, a great obstruction and bondage.....
>
> In considering the above factors, one may say that it is only a partial social truth. It has been seen that wherever the society has put the pressure of chastity or purity on women, it has led to real failure in social and family discipline as well as in

> conjugal life. But it does not mean that chastity is a barbaric or uncivilized superstition and an empty system. The chastity or sexual purity on its own, all along, from the primitive times, has made the woman what she is – civilized, graceful and respected. It did not originate in feudalism or capitalism, because in fact, it is no system. The chastity is a culture to arrive at feminism, the real essence of a woman..... A woman's never–fading ideal, and never–failing culture is chastity. It is independent of place, time, condition and container. It is correct that the negatively motivated and ritualistic social and familial chastity is without any worth as the geneological family culture or tradition carries it through. The real chastity or sexual purity is a woman's personal consideration. It is born out of the inspiration provided by good sense, and because of that it makes women more adorable than men, and gives them a valuable and distinct place and respect.

(v)

Both Kuntala Kumari Sabat and Sarala Devi had distinct place among the Oriya women writers. On the one hand, at a time of social and political turmoil, immediately before Independence, they could formulate the feminine spirit and establish the feminine identity on a sure footing. On the other, they could provide the necessary inspiration and clarity of thought and action to subsequent women writers who rose to constitute a vital and powerful tradition of writing in the post-Independence Oriya literature. The first powerful group of women writers whose careers spanned both the pre– and post–Independence times, were Debahuti Dei (1902–1979), Nirmala Devi (1907–1987), Manamohini Devi (1908–1981) and Haripriya Devi (1915–?).

Debahuti was the daughter of the poet Suchitra Devi and belonged to Kuranjipur in the district of Puri. She was both a poet and a story–teller. Her poems, usually in easy and simple structure, show a fine sensitiveness to nature along with a delicate longingness for light, fulfilment, and happiness. Thus, as in the poem *Trusita Abani* (The Thirsty Earth), the sun–burnt earth waits longingly for the rains, like a lady–love waiting for the lover to bring an end to her burnt–happiness :

Tortured by a cruel sun
The earth looks up and sighs,
The body is dry without greenness
The heart has burst into two without hope
All directions smoky, body sunburnt
The smooth cover of grass lost, dead,
Fire rages in forest, in water
And in her mind it spreads –
The grace gone, the body tired, distressed.

....

If ever the first drop touches the body in love
The earth wakes up shiveringly in happiness,
And the touch of love like new life –
The fulfilments in laughter, fragrance and happiness.

Elsewhere in another poem entitled *Smrutitie* (A Memory), the poet recollects regretfully about a person she liked, and who was cut short by death untimely :

The fierce fate did not tolerate her
The cruel insect of time came
And cut her roots with its teeth
And all beauty dried up,
Her delicate body, so graceful
Got rotten and joined earth,
But sweet fragrance of her memory
Remains in heart, awake day and night.

Debahuti's collection of poetry was entitled **Mali** (Garland) and her stories, which were mostly family-stories with folk tale structure, and written in an easy felicitous style, were collected in two volumes, entitled **Kathamanjari** (Story–Buds) and **Kathakusum** (Story–Flowers)

Nirmala Devi belonged to an aristocratic Karan family of Balikuda, in the district of Cuttack, a cousin of Sarala Devi and Nityananda Kanungo. She was given in marriage at an early age to Durga Charan Das, a well–known officer at that time of Orissa Administratrive Service, and from the beginning she had to shoulder the responsibility of a sprawling family, including her own 13 children, the eldest of whom was Professor Bidhubhusan Das (1922–1999), the legendary

teacher, scholar and educationist of Orissa. But family responsibility and social obligations notwithstanding and in spite of inadequate formal education, she was creative almost from the beginning, and till her death in 1987, she continued to compose thousands of lyrics with remarkable spiritual perception and love for nature which earned her recognition as one of the finest of such poets in the post-Independence Oriya literature. Some of her poems were collected at a later age of her career in three volumes, entitled **Dinante** (At the Day's End, 1953), **Seemante** (At the Frontier, 1962) and **Barnaraga** (Multiple Colours, 1986). She excelled in a mystic apprehension of life with love as a key force, which was expressed with remarkable felicity of language. Such is the poem *Sarag Parase* (Touch of Love) :

> Oh, my friend, look!
> Beyond this dark road of night, in the east
> The golden brush draws the sparkling picture,
> The trees and creepers, loaded with leaves
> And happy with the touch of young dawn
> Greet each other on the face of the lake,
> And innumerable flowers and fruits drop so lovingly
> At that sweet, seductive moment
> As offerings at the feet of Mother Goddess;
> Whatever was dark and sinful
> At that joining point of life and death
> Look, oh friend, fades,
> And new beauty is carved everywhere;
> Whatever is left unused, untouched
> To be written in the life's almanac,
> And all the knots of unfulfilment, oh, look,
> They all open there, beyond.

One can note how joy, happiness as well as a responsiveness to the beauty of nature, and a perception of things beyond, have joined together to provide a poem of power and richness.

Elsewhere in a poem entitled *Nisun Tatinir Dhare* (On the Bank of the Lonely River) the wait for love to be fulfilled is full of agony and pain, and shows the protagonist's fear and insecurities :

On the bank of this lonely river
I wait, counting days and hours
Again and again,
Waiting to hear your footfalls.
Dark, blind night surrounds me, oh friend, come,
And please, take away my garland of tears.
The lamp of my eyes is put out
I am alone in darkness,
And all my life's flowers drop off ...

In her introduction to **Barnarga** (that received Orissa Sahitya Akademi award) Nirmala Devi writes about her poems very revealingly– "I don't remember the times when I wrote my poems. I have been writing for the last about 50 years. My education is slight. I believe he, who is most intimate to one, is inside me, and he gets everything written through me. That is why, I bow to him from my deepest heart".

Manamohini Devi, like Nirmala Devi, was also a prolific writer who wrote in poetry and prose and wrote continuously for more than 50 years. Coming from an affluent family in Cuttack district she was married also in an affluent family, and as in Nirmala Devi's case, so too in her case, writing was a side pastime. But writing came to her easily and she combined the style of medieval Oriya poetry with the style of Madhusudan and Radhanath, as also the styles of contemporary 'Sabuja' poets. In addition, many of her poems adopted the rhymes and the structure of Oriya folk poetry. Contentwise her poems showed deep understanding of life along with sharp, realistic attitudes. Though she spent most of her time in the city, her poems had a continuous tilt towards rural life, manners and habits, and her descriptions were vivid and exciting. Her books include **Jharana** (The Stream, 1947), **Geetali** (Songs, 1954), **Pushpali** (The Flowers, 1962), **Arkabali** (1972), **Banani** (The Forest Yard, 1948– 68), **Anabana O Abasesa** (The Scattered and Remnant Pieces, 1947–81) and essays, memoirs, and letters. A poem entitled *Sukhara Dina* (The Gift of Happiness) shows the poet's feelings at a rural dawn:

Awake, awake, the cuckoo calls loudly
The dawn peeps from the corner of the trees.
Startled the sleep ended,

The morning flowers spread fragrance
The wind's magic whip-lashed all around
And what a mess the sweet dawn made !

Manmohini's prose was equally powerful, and full of emotional pull. Thus this is how she shows her vexation at how women are treated:

> At the end I like to say this much that women alone are not responsible for their fall. Men are equally responsible. If women are not dressed up as sweet, colourful beings and as items of luxury, then they would be making their contribution to the world. Lots of things are being talked about, but in practice she is presented as a showpiece, a slave to desires... Let not women, irrespective of their caste or religion, think that their intelligence, competence, and self-dependance are something to be ashamed of. Let them labour, earn their own livelihood, and promote the spirit of freedom. (1959).

Haripriya Devi was a cousin of Sarala Devi and Nirmala Devi and was married in a distinguished Karan family of Cuttack town. Her early poems were written in the thirties and were first collected in 1940, in a volume entitled **Saradi** (About Autumn). The poems showed the poet's fine imagination and strong emotions. One of the poems in the collection entitled *Rajputbalar Patra* (The Letter of a Rajput Maiden) was written in blank verse, but most other poems, many of which dealt with the description of seasons and rural life, were written in rhyming melodious structure. In fact, Haripriya largely dealt with three themes - portraits of rural life and festivals, rural nature, and strong personal emotions bordering on subtle spiritualism; Her other books include **Jagarini** (The Morning Song), **Kuhu** (The Cuckoo), a poetic drama, **Biswamitra and Menaka** and a number of translations from Kalidas.

Haripriya's delicate sense of beauty vis-a-vis nature can be seen in the two following extracts. The first one is from the poem *Kumar Purnima* which relates to the festival observed by the unmarried girls in the villages – a festival in honour of the bright autumn moon :

The full-moon night smiles,
The wind blows slowly
Mad with fragrance of evening flowers,
While flowers have bloomed

In the beautiful garden of nature
The moon-washed green earth
Looks like a new bride...

The second extract is from *Phaguna-Rani* (The Spring Queen) – an address to the sweet spring season :

Your song is in cucko's voice
Your breath is sweet south wind,
In happiness of union
The wet celestial beauty
Ripples over the earth's body,
And drinking your sweet-scented wine
The bumblebee goes crazy,
And steals honey from flowers
And leaves all shame to wind.

Elsewhere there are other types of emotion, such as a sense of unfulfillment, as in *Byathar Puja* (The Worship of Pain) :

I have made offerings to pain all through my life, O friend,
My pride has failed, my tears have ended
So many nights of sorrow,
In my heart the sea of pain
Swells up again and again,
And my restless mind
Never listens to whatever I say.

Haripriya combined many emotions, from personal to social and national, and excelled in most.

(vi)

Independence was like an awakening. In many ways it expanded horizons, and brought in newer ideas, newer perceptions and spurred activities, both physical and mental. As in Oriya literature in general, so too, women writers multiplied, and what was a small and select stream beforehand became a powerful flowing river. The woman's spirit became free and multifarious, its range expanded and the perceptions became richer and deeper. What is proposed below, is a select study of relatively more important women writers who in general reflected the changing times and incorporated the many complications

of modern living in the structure of their writing.

The first group so listed were born between early twenties and early thirties, and their creative power came to fruition beginning from the fifties onwards. They were Labangalata Devi (b. 1922). Bidyut Prava Devi (1926–1977), Basant Kumari Pattanaik (b.1927) and Brahmotri Mohanty (b.1934).

Labangalata Devi belongs to Haladibasanta in the district of Cuttack. She is not only the oldest of four but also most prolific, her total number of books being more than 30. She has written novels, stories, biography, essays etc. as well as done a number of translations from Sanskrit, particularly Sanskrit tales. Her novels which deal with social problems, with emphasis on family and familial love, particularly husband-wife relationship, include such books as, **Manara Manisha** (Man of Choice), **Hasa Hasa Mora Priya** (Oh, Smile, my Sweet Heart), **Swapnar Surabhi** (The Fragrance of Dream) and **Patan O Abhyudaya** (The Fall and The Rise) etc. The similar themes continue in the stories too, themes related to family and society, and include such books as **Galpa Chayan** (Collection of Stories) and **Sanchyita** (Collection). The biographies were mostly short accounts about various women of past and present, who achieved distinction, and include such books as **Bidusi Nari** (The Scholarly Women) and **Birangana** (Heroic Women) etc. Even her essays were on the problems of Indian women, being entitled **Bharatiya Nari**. Besides, she translated 'Kadambari', 'Raghubansa', 'Harsa Charita' etc. into Oriya with much felicity. In fact, Labangalata's talent ranged into many directions. She wrote seriously and consistently with knowledge and information, for which she came to be popularly known as 'Bidushi', which means scholarly and wise.

Bidyutprava was also prolific. But she stuck to one genre, that is, poetry, which she had started writing from her very young days and continued the habit almost till her death, which happened untimely and accidentally. Her formal education was very limited (up to class ix) but she educated herself at home, and in a way got well-versed in contemporary poetry. One powerful and dominating aspect of her poetry was her sensitiveness to the beauties of rural nature as well as to rural habits, manners and festivals. This was because a substantial part of her life was spent in villages, on the banks of rivers, both before and

after her marriage, both in the childhood days as well as in adult life, a large part of which she could absorb in her personality and attitudes. Another aspect could be seen in her poems for children which she started writing after the birth of her first child and continued off and on in her career. A third was a subtle spiritual element which was always present in her poetry, at times in distinct formulation, at times as a part of her poems dealing with nature, love or family affairs, and finally as clear expressions of her strong devotion for Sri Aurobinda and Sri Mother. She had also other independent emotions, such as emotions of love, of family relationship, of joy, and happiness and sorrow in daytoday life. Bidyutprava's poetry had many admirers. She carved a distinct place for herself – a place of love and respect, and like Kuntala Kumari before Independence, she established the Oriya woman writer's personality immediately after Independence.

Bidyutprava's parental village was in Ali (Aul) area in the then Cuttack district, but a part of her early years were spent in Cuttack town, where her father, Nimai Charan Das, a well–known writer, encouraged her to write and made arrangements to publish her poems. Her early books were **Sabitā** (The Sun, 1944), **Utkal Saraswata Prativā** (Literary Talents of Orissa, 1947), **Kanakānjali** (Offerings of Gold, 1948), **Marichikā** (Mirage, 1948) and **Bihāyasi** (The Winged Bird, 1949) – all published before her marriage, in July, 1949. It is interesting to note that a number of eminent literary personalities of the time, such as Sashibhusan Roy, Kalindi Charan Panigrahi, Mayadhar Mansingha, and Radhamohan Gadanayak etc. wrote forewords to her different books, and praised her poems very highly. This was a matter of great happiness for Bidyutprava and an extraordinary incentive to her to write more poems. This is how her husband Panchanana Mohanty recollects – "She had come to our house just about 15 days ago. She was already restless how to renew her writing. The village had no electricity. She had to read with the help of a lantern, which she used to do quietly for hours together. At that time, about 3 or 4 of her poems used to be published in different journals of Orissa every month. They were mostly of love and exciting experiences of a new life of love and responsibility, and were written with a good deal of courage and sincerity. All the poems that she wrote in our village during those 6/7

months after marriage, were subsequently published in book forms in 1951 and 1952."

Such books were, **Bandanikā** (Worshipping, 1949) whose cover picture was drawn by Bimbadhar Verma, the most eminent Oriya painter of the time, **Swapnadipa** (The Lamp of Dream, 1951), and **Jharā Siuli** (Fallen Flowers, 1952) for which Bidyutprava herself wrote an introduction. The books dealt with dreams and joys of youthful love. Subsequent books were, **Jahāku Jie** (Everybody to Himself, 1955) , her first book for children, which laterly got an award from Government of India; **Sanchayna** (Collection, 1956) which contained all of Bidyutprava's poems till that date; **Mo Penkāli Bajei De** (Please Blow my Mouth Organ, 1960) also a book for children, as well as other such books as, **Gachhapatara** (The Trees and Leaves, 1960), **Mu Kemiti Pila** (What a Child I am, 1961) and **Kāhinki Tume** (Why You, 1963), etc. The year 1963, when Bidyutprava came in contact with Sri Maa and Sri Aurobinda Ashram, made a definite break in her life, and all her latent spiritualism took a concrete formulation round The Mother and the Ashram. Her such books were **Pushpānjali** (Flower Offerings, 1967), and **Jyotisikhā** (The Divine Flame) and **Suryamukhi** (The Sun Flower), both published in 1973. To quote again from Sri Mohanty—"Between October, 1970 and May, 1971, she had almost finished all her writings of her career's last phase. She composed a number of poems on what she considered her life's goal, that is, on Sri Maa, Sri Aurobinda, and the Ashram, as well as about her own intense spiritual cravings, and such poems were regularly published in the Ashram's Oriya journal."

Bidyutprava's alert, intense poetic talent ranged across diverse areas, and everywhere they were marked by immense clarity, sincerity and involvement, like a dialogue that carries enchantment and joy to the reader. Thus this is how she sees the essential beauty of nature, like the coming of a responsive living soul:

Do you really come with sweet notes of spring
When songs of rain fall on the face of earth ?
Do you play the bugle of thunder
On the top of dark clouds
With the lightening-lamp in hand ?
Do you really come, I wonder,

Along the dew-washed path
Under the veil of mist
And over the heads of hills,
When the forest of fallen-leaves murmurs
And when the birds gather in a festival
Across the golden fields of crops, (*Sāswati*)

Or the relationship of love with intense feelings of regret and joy:

Like us, innumerable bubbles in this earth
Blow up and vanish in a moment
Under the waters of foamy blue sea,
And in bitter separation this happy life ends
The sweet relationship like the last breath in the west.
Could you tell me, Oh friend, could you,
When separated, where do we go, .
Where, to which unknown land ?
Have you ever thought of even in surprise
How we have no claims whatsoever
Never so permanently
In this beautiful land, this sweet land ...? (*Dasaharā*)

Elsewhere, when she composed a poem on Sri Ma, it throbbed with intense spiritualism:

Where I am wherever I go
Wherever I look for whatever,
It is Mother's smile Mother's beauty,
I get her always.
I have no fear, no dread, no hesitation
Wherever I look I see her eyes
Looking at me always. (*Pushpānjali*)

Unlike Bidyutprava, Basant Kumari had a full formal education (She was an M. A.) and also unlike the former who stuck to one genre, she experimented in many forms, such as novel, story, poetry and one-act plays. She started writing immediately after Independence, around 1950, and continued to write throughout the fifties till early sixties, after which she wrote very sparingly, and today she is mostly engaged in translating J. Krishnamurti's works into Oriya. She has three novels, entitled **Amadābāta** (The Untrodden Path, 1951), **Chorābāli** (The Shifting

Sands) and **Bhaunri** (The Whirlpool, 1955) ; three story collections, entitled **Savyatāra Sāja** (The Trappings of Civilization, 1950), **Pālatā Dheu** (The Returning Wave, 1952) and **Jiban Chinha** (The Signet of Life); two poetry collections entitled **Chitānal** (The Pyre, 1956) and **Taranga** (The Waves, 1957); and two collections of one-act plays, entitled **Juārabhattā** (The Tide and Ebb, 1952) and **Mrugaturshnā** (The Mirage, 1956). But it was in novel that she made a mark ; and particularly her one novel, that is, **Amadabata**, has come to be reckoned as a classic of the modern times.

Basant Kumari, who did not marry and now more than 70, belongs to an affluent and enlightened family of Cuttack city, and has lived in Cuttack throughout. Thus Cuttack provides a strong motive force in her works along with an almost continuous refrain of unhappiness, regret and unfulfilment. This is how she records it in her poem *Byarthatā* (Failure) from **Chitānal** :

> The tornado of hundred pains kills the body once
> But my heart dies daily, friend, again and again
> And the innumerable unfulfilled desires that murmur in me
> Die bit by bit, all of that, in my deepest being.
> The failures of my life squeeze me
> They make me numb,
> They burn all my sweetness
> And smear my body with the ashes of failure.

In stories too, as in **Savyatar Saja** or **Palata Dheu**, that have social bearings and fine portrayal of characters, a similar melancholic strain continues, how man in spite of his best efforts and sincerest desires, fails and makes a mess of his own doings.

Amadabat is the best work of Basant Kumari, and shows her creative power at its best. A fine social novel, it deals with the living conditions and difficulties of a Oriya middle-class family settled in Cuttack town. The head of the family is a Government employee and he has 4 sons and a daughter. In time the eldest picked up a job, and the daughter grew up to be given away in marriage. The latter situation is most crucial and the novel deals with the family's attempts to get the daughter married, which is finally done. In the process the whole structure of the Oriya middle-class family is laid bare with its joys,

happiness, limitations and dependence, and the tale of one family almost becomes an archetype of all such families that had settled in towns in the post-Independence period in Orissa. Still more important is the daughter Maya, a restless, outspoken, extremely affectionate young woman, who has probably become the most-loved woman-character in the entire post-Independence Oriya novel. The portrayal of Maya is so sincere, so involved, so full of sympathy and understanding, one wonders if there is not a strain of Basanta Kumari's own autobiographical element in her. There are other aspects too, such as a racy style, in contemporary idiom, with frequent references to folk proverbs, saws etc., as well as a keen perception of the plight of women in society who are often subjected to immense physical and mental pressure due to the so called duty to the family and the society. At the same time there is an ubiquitous presence of a sense of loss, incapacity, and helplessness, where people strive after joy, happiness and homogeneity only to find that such things do not sustain on the face of changing social mores and individual intransigence. A reference to women as in the following, involving Maya's parents is a pertinent example - "Mahibou, sat on a chair and gazed fixedly at her husband's face. As if she was saying to herself— 'I married you but you have killed me. No male will ever understand this sorrow of death. This is dying bit by bit - a living burial. Who knows the destiny of how many unfortunates like me would not be pressed under the feet of their husbands'. She looked away and tried to drive away the tear oozing out of her eyes... Pitambar Babu got hurt. While digging for tuber roots Lord Mahadev has come out ! But what else he would have done ? What the women generally want - husband, income, house, ornaments, clothes - he has given unhesitatingly to his wife. But never this murmuring of unfulfilled desires in his wife's heart has reached his ears, or may be unknowingly he has avoided it. That murmuring has now reached the proportion of a loud wailing. Pitambar Babu concentrated all his senses to listen to that mild murmur of the past. Lamentation inside the house. He gazed intently outside, at the sky. The same lamentation. As if the atmosphere is now full of the heart-rending wailing and lamentation of women, and the hideous noise dulls the ear. This is not the mild murmur of unfulfilled desires of Mahibou alone - as

if bodiless innumerable souls of women flit about in the air and weep and say – 'oh, our lives are gone, dead'. **Amadabata** is a fine social document, a fine portrayal of a young woman who slowly learns how to come to terms with social reality, and by implication it provides a sharp exposition of woman's identity and dignity.

Brahmotri Mohanty, who belongs to Puri, has written only in one genre, that is, poetry. Her early poems, published in the fifties, in spite of their romantic structure related to love, passion and soft emotions, generally conformed with the new poetry movement in Orissa that had emerged after Independence, and exposed the uncertainty, insecurity and loneliness of a soul in agony, particularly as related to women. Subsequently, her poems took a deep spiritual note, and from an exposition of life's insecurities she came over to contemplate on life's meaning, joy and congeniality. Some of her important books are **Abatarana** (Descent, 1972)), **Drustira Dyuti** (The Shine of the Eyes, 1981) and **Stabaka** (Buds, 1988) etc. An early motif in her poems is 'slip', that is, how one slips and falls, which from a simple physical situation extends to slips in life's situations as well as to mental–slips, an expression of uncertainty which often plagues the protagonist. A poem is similarly entitled – *Hathāt Goda Khasijibā Pare* (After a Sudden Slip) :

Startled I looked around
Hasn't anybody seen it ?
They might have seen it
But likely I haven't seen them.
Terrific palpitation in the heart
Great suspicion in the mind,
If they haven't seen
They all would be coming to see it now.
Then, what should I answer ?-
I have to tell some lies.
But if enquiries continue
Not impossible I may be caught -
Then, then, how can I save myself,
How ?
My forehead sweats

My face becomes red
and the sound of cricket in my ears.
No, let my clothes be torn
The feet injured
Let something break,
I haven't fallen, never.-
When did I fall ?
Damn lies–
I just jumped while I walked.

The sentiments of uncertainty one can also note in poems that deal with love and lover's involvement, such as, in a poem entitled *Sansati* (Suspicion) :

I know it is my great mistake to suspect you,
But to love you without suspicion without anxiety
I know that is also impossible,
My love is always plagued with fear
And in that whirlpool of fear
I renew myself every time.
I am terribly selfish
And if you feel irritated that is your mistake,
My suspicion is your glory
My vision is limited like a bird's eye-view
And release from suspicion is only death to love.

Even in poems that deal with spiritual emotions, the poet sticks to the sentiments of uncertainty and suspicion, as in the following extract from **Stabak** (83):

I walk in front and you at my back
Yet, even knowing that
Why do I look back again and again ?
If I can't have faith in you
Then the whole life is meaningless -
This testing you every time with suspicion,
I try my hardest to have faith in you
But can I keep it ?
My ears buzz with comments against you
They are enough to unsettle my heart,

Is it possible to continue my love for you
When my heart is so torn, so chaotic ?

Labangalata, Bidyutprava, Basant Kumari and Brahmotri formulated new sentiments and advanced new perceptions among women writers after Independence. They not only identified and established a free, though troubled feminine-spirit in poetry and novel, yet, at the same time pioneered the new freedom and confidence to emerge into substantial shape and power from the sixties onwards.

(vii)

The present literary scene, as regards women writers, particularly after 1960, is a very crowded one, more so in the last about 25 years, when a large number of women writers, both young and elderly, have taken to writing in all genres. It would be better first of all, to consider in some detail, a few major or more important writers who have in general a representative quality, and then to survey other writers briefly, to specify the trends. Such writers whose careers began mostly in the sixties, and who have subsequently established themselves as important women writers in their genres, are first of all, Binapani Mohanty (b. 1936) Prativa Roy (b. 1944), and Prativa Satapathy (b. 1945).

Binapani belonged to Chandol area of Cuttck district and being trained in Economics served in the Government colleges of Orissa. She is not married. Her writing started from early sixties, and except occasional forays to novel writing, and very early in career to poetry compositions, she has steadily pursued one genre, that is, short story, where she is established as a substantial writer, and received Central Sahitya Akademi award for her contribution to short story in 1990, the first-ever Oriya woman writer to get this prestigious award. She has written more than 400 short stories which have been collected in a number of volumes, beginning with the first one **Nabatarang** (New Wave) in 1963. Some of her other important collections are, **Kashturi Mruga O Sabuja Aranya** (The Camphor Deer and Green Forest, 1967), **Tatinir Trushnā** (The Thirst of the Stream, 1972), **Andhakārar Chhāi** (The Shadows of Darkness, 1976), **Bastraharan** (Rape of Clothes, 1980), **Khelanā** (Toys, 1983), **Pātadei** (Sister Pata, 1987), **Banhibalaya** (The

Circle of Fire, 1990), and **Asru Anala** (Fires of Tear, 1992) etc. Binapani's views about her own story writing are revealing. She writes – "It is only natural that whenever there is a new turn in time or in struggles for living, the social values change and a new consciousness of life emerges. The changes are in tone, in documentation, and in the entire identity of one's own being. This is like a radical consciousness which has its own perception and attitude towards life, and in literature results in new inspiration and new style. I should say, these aid my stories as well as my experiences and expression".

Binapani's stories are integrated with the society they portray, and provide a free, frank expression of the naked, brutal reality that surrounds the social man, particularly the woman, and her failures and unsuccesses, and how she is tortured and exploited almost to the extent of a negation of spirit. This is not specifically related to money or income, though money forms a part of the consideration, like social or familial change. The perception of failure goes much deeper. It rises from the mental attitudes and at one level gets integrated with one's whole being. But at another level it widens and becomes a part of modern man's feelings of unsuccess and unfulfilment as a whole - an insight into the complete futility through which the modern man lives. A representative example would be the story *Patadei*, where a woman, tortured and exploited by the society and gang-raped, learns to compromise with her agony and suffering, and tries to hit back only when pushed to the brim - a brutal condition of melancholy and compassion - "Suddenly nobody knew what happened. Pata kicked off the old woman's leg and stood up. Like a straight five-feet elderly woman ! A violet colour of mixed confidence and contempt glowed on her face. She picked up the crying child and looked sharply at the villagers - 'Do you want to know who's the father of this child? O.K., look, look at all these. All these are his fathers. This Ramu, Bira, Gopi, Maguni, Naria, and all those three or four there at the back ..... Well, whose child ? How can I say ? Ask that Haria Bauri who took money from them and left me at Cuttack .... Now, please ask them aunt. Let them say, if they have the courage, who's the father?"

In fact Bina's stories have both brutal realism which shocks and cuts through, and thin, border lines of strength and compassion. Another

appropriate example would be the story *Khelana* (Toy), where in the context of complete physical devastation brought by floods, man becomes a wreck, both physically and mentally - like toys tossed about by more powerful elements. Yet there is man's support for each other and compassion, when the sight of a piece of a palm of a dead child brought to the protagonist sudden memories of love and helplessness related to his own dead child- "On looking down he was startled seeing something. Oh God ! The little palm of a little child ! He picked it up, kissed it, and burst into tears. But the river's roar like the sea's roar swallowed his cry..."

Bina's stories have many aspects But one important aspect is her strong sympathy for women, particularly a keen sensitiveness for women's plight and suffering, and an inherent support to whatever stand women take in society in adverse situations. An example is *Byuhaveda* (Penetrating the Circle) where the protagonist Malati has to undergo continuous humiliation as well as physical and mental torture because she is a working–woman. When finally one morning, her eldest daughter leaves the house for ambitions in the film–world, and all blame is put by her husband and the mother-in-law on her, she resents – "Whether she serves or not, whether she keeps the family, the husband, the sons and daughters in convenience or not, why should the blame for the daughter's elopement be put on her ? She does not know a whit abut it. All her identity that had been lost to her for a long time as she moved between the office and the home, now suddenly came and possessed her. She had suffered all that brutish torture for no reason. As if she alone was responsible for all that had gone wrong with her husband, in the family and in the world !" But ultimately all Malati's resentment is reduced to a sheer helplessness and to a pressing desire how to make free oneself – "When she closes her eyes, or when alone, or when even in crowd, she imagines as if she sees a picture... that is, she is running breathlessly, on hot sands. She is thirsty, her throat is almost bursting – all around only sands and sands, mounds of sands and cruel biting hot sun..." Bina's understanding is deep and penetrating, and her awareness of contemporary life is one of the sharpest in modern Oriya literature.

Prativa Roy has written novels and stories and in both forms she has been established as an important writer. She has about 18 novels

and the same number of story–collections so far, that include such novels as **Silāpadma** (the Stone Lotus, 1983), a novel on Konark, the famous sun–temple; **Jājnaseni** (Yajnaseni, 1984) a narration of Mahabharat queen Draupadi's experiences in the first person; **Uttarmārg** (The Follow–Up Road, 1988) a novel about the freedom–fighters including her own father, in her own area, that is, Balikuda in the Cuttack district; and **Ādibhumi** (The Primal Land, 1993) a novel about the Bondas based on close documentation and research ; as well as story–collections such as, **Itibrutak** (All about, 1987), **Haritapatra** (The Gray Leaves, 1989), **Pruthak Iswar** (Separate God, 1991), **Bhagbānr Des** (The Country of Bhagban, 1991), stories about the Bonda tribe, and **Ullanghana** (Crossing, 1998) that got her Central Sahitya Akedemi award in 2000.

Prativa like Bina is deeply involved with social factors and attitudes and her insight is as probing and sharp. But she has a larger dimension in the sense that she has divergent interest which go to accommodate her to divergent readership. In fact many of her books have topped the best-seller lists for many years. This is particularly so with **Yajnaseni** that has been a very popular book, and has also been awarded Jnanpitha's Murti Devi Award. Prativa's forte has been a remarkable felicity seen in her coordination of subject matters and attitudes. No doubt, in these there is a definite trend to uphold what may be called the woman's point of view, but on the whole her writings project a more comprehensive understanding of life and life's problems. A good example is **Yajnaseni** itself. In about 450 pages, it is a good account of Draupadi, as she sees herself with relation to various Mahabharat incidents and characters, particularly with relation to Krishna. In fact, Draupadi's relationship with Krishna provides the main motive–force in the novel. Though nothing physical, yet the strong invisible bond assumes the structure of physical intimacy, and the whole novel is addressed to Krishna (at a time when Draupadi falls a victim at Himavant at the end) to whom she communicates her hopes and desires, not as the great queen she was, but very much as a woman of flesh and blood who all along carried an immense emptiness in herself occasioned by her tortuous and suffering life. Equally interesting are her two other novels that is, **Uttarmarg** and **Adibhumi**. Both are rooted in their localities and deal with particular categories of people, that is, freedom-fighters

in the former, and an ancient tribe in the latter. But both also at the same time, move beyond their limitations of time and space to emerge as interesting documents of contemporary, and not so contemporary relevance, dealing with man and man's multiple patterns of living. Once in answer to a query how she writes, whether she is confined by sex, love etc., or by being a woman, a wife, a mother, or a daughter-in-law etc., she replied that when she writes it is one role, a total creator's role, where such peripheral considerations do not exist. In this she is one with Basant Kumari or.with Binapani. What matters is how best a sensitive and alert writer comes to grip with the contemporary challenges of existence. In Prativa's novels and stories these challenges have been shaped substantially and meaningfully with a rare spirit and understanding.

Prativa's mode varies,.yet a few quotations may be given to suggest essential structure of her thought. The first is from her novel **Yajanaseni**, at a point where Draupadi had to face the toughest and the most intriguing situation of her life, whether to marry one or five brothers:

> I am Yajanaseni, my birth is to uphold Dharma. If attracted by this mortal body, the Pandav brothers, so courageous, judicious and wise, have been committed by an oath to their mother, let it be so. In their sacrifice for Dharma let my body be an oblation. Really, what is this body ? From where has it come—where does it go - I don't know. This body is not 'me', my hands, legs, limbs, they are not 'me', neither any particular part of my body is 'me'. Then let all get this body and be happy. Let them be united, why should I obstruct ? This body has grown from five elements-earth, water, fire, wind and sky, and can't I remain true and faithful if I offer this to five husbands... Man's mind is so restless, so mysterious, one can't say whether it remains attached to one, and only one. Therefore if I get five husbands I will also get Arjuna, and that is my consolation and happiness. I answered in a calm, composed voice – "I will accept all the five brothers as my husbands".

The second is from a story entitled *Bhadralok* (Gentleman) which shows the great remorse of a lady for her indifference and misunderstanding related to her one time well-wisher old teacher:

> Suddenly one day a registered letter came from Naran Master. Her husband and children teased – Look, the summons have come. Lest the letter for help be missed, that's why through registered post. You can't escape now. Of course you learnt your alphabets from him ! See how much fees you have to pay — Subhadra's face reddened in sorrow and remorse, she opened the letter in great anxiety. She was stunned when she read it. Her education, culture, social prestige, wealth, status – every thing was raged to the ground by a single letter... Subhadra had copious tears when one day she had heard the death of her father. But today she is crying with blood. Because that day tears streamed from her eyes – but today it is blood oozing out from her heart.

Prativa Satapathy wrote in one genre, that is, poetry, and her earliest poems were published in the early sixties, and her first poetry book **Asta Janhar Eligi** (Elegy for the Setting-Moon) in 1970. Her subsequent poetry–collections so far are, **Grasta Samaya** (The Possessed Time, 1974) **Sāhādā Sundari** (Sahada Beauty, 1978), **Niyata Basudhā** (Eternal Earth, 1980), **Nimise Akhyar** (An Alphabet for a Moment, 1985), **Mahāmegha** (The Great Cloud, 1988), **Sabari** (The Forest Woman,1991) and **Tanmaya Dhuli** (The Possessed Dust, 1996). Prativa, like Bina and Prativa Roy belongs to former undivided Cuttack district, and like them too, has her career as a college teacher. In all three, the context is middle-class, that is, the habits, attitudes and living conditions of such people who have come over from the villages to the cities, particularly Cuttack and Bhubaneswar—the elites of contemporary Orissa. As Bina and Prativa Roy wrote stories and novels, we have more or less continuous feedback to the complications of socio–psychological personality of these people. In Prativa, who has kept herself confined to poetry, the explicit structural documentation is replaced by subtle emotional nuances and perception, related to individual relationship, and particularly to individual's reactions to items of existence and movements of time.

In fact, Prativa's poetic preoccupations are complicated, and has many levels, almost like a slow, tortuous movement, from feelings of negation and emptiness towards desires of fulfilments and joy, and finally

towards mixed feelings of realization and uncertainty. The following extracts give a brief idea of her poetic flexibility. First for example, the extract form the poem *Samrajni* (Empress) from the volume **Grasta Samaya**, indicates a sense of uncertainty and helplessness:

At times, at midnight, at a careless moment
It appears somebody calls me,
The echo sounds in the corners of the sky
The trees shiver, the tall bamboos tremble,
But how soft, slow and secret !
It takes away my senses
Makes me a poor beggar
Draws me away from my husband, children
And throws me into a pit of helpless emotion,
It appears all my wealth is false—
Only a mark of deep wound, the lifelong agony of defeat.
The restless wind pats the wings of dead birds.
Where is my consolation ?
I am the false empress in this kingdom.

Similar sentiments continue further, for example, in the poem *Darpita Āgama* (The Proud Coming) from the volume **Sāhādā Sundari**, where the perception of loss and helplessness is equated with the coming death:

There I am alone, all alone
Growing in the lake of ice
And my blood freezes at the touch of cold,
And the doctor like a boat
Drifts away from me to a far distance.
He comes on a buffalo, with a garland of red China rose
And white swans fly away before his coming,
And on deserted dryness in front
He puts his flag in proud possession.

But the perception changes, away from helplessness, towards joy and fulfilment, initially halting, hesitant, as in *Jāni na thili ta* (I didn't know at all) from the volume **Nimise Akhyara** :

That the familiar tree on the way
Should call me like that,
I didn't know.

That it should extend its fresh, green palm
Leaning over me with its honey-coloured fruits and flowers
And make my path so musical
With bird's carols -
I didn't know.
I also didn't know
That at that moment
The wind should whisper
All unintelligible words at my ears
And startled earth should scatter its fragrance all around.

But finally a confident realization, as in **Sabari** (p. 70):

I stood in front of twilight,
In my two eyes
Two setting sparkling colours,
My heart was filled with many desires
Of liquid colours.
And suddenly, I do not know why
I wiped away desires except one,
And from the dark womb
Of that single desire
I germinated,
Drawing holy fertility,
From all death
I blossomed in a strange body of creepers
With branches, buds, leaves.

Prativa is one among the finest Oriya poets writing today, (she got Central Sahitya Akademy Award in 2001) and the subtlety of her feelings and understanding, apart from their strong feminine sentiments, have significantly added to the current poetic richness of modern Oriya literature.

(viii)

Allied to the remarkable achievements of Bina, Prativa Roy and Prativa Satpathy, it would be appropriate to consider the work of four more writers, who have achieved eminence in their respective fields and have

extended the dimensions of woman-writing in Oriya. These are Banaja Devi (b. 1941), Bijayini Das (b. 1944), Manorama Biswal Mahapatra (b. 1948) and Sakuntala Panda (b. 1938).

Banaj Devi, who originally belonged to Khurda, wrote in many forms, and started her writing career very early in life with poetry. Her first-ever book, a poetry-collection, entitled **Banahaladi** (The Wild Turmeric) was published in 1958, and contained all her poems that she had written in late fifties. Her second poetry book, **Barsāra Balākā** (The Swans of the Rains) was published 30 years after, in 1988, and contained most of the poems that she had written between 1965 and 1985. Her early novels **Rādhā** (Radha) and **Sei Jhiati** (That Girl) that narrated the woman's life of torture and sorrow, continued to provide main motifs in her subsequent novels, entitled **Belābhumi** (The Sea Beach, 1976), Maru Jharanā (The Desert Spring), **Nadi O Naukā** (The River and the Boat) and **Bidagdha Basanta**, (Burnt–out Spring). Her stories too, that have socio-psychological structure, largely deal with motivations and attitudes related to the growth, development and complications of modern woman's psyche. The story–collections are, so far, **Ketoti Sabuja Patra** (A Few Green Leaves, 1986), **Tārā Phutibār Belā** (The Time for Stars to Blossom, 1987), **Bastisara Soka** (The Sorrow in the Colony) and **Rāgbehāg** (The Raga Behaga, 1994).

Banaj Devi's writings are, in a way, one-piece, that is, her poems, stories and novels more or less deal with similar themes, similar attitudes and provide similar understanding of life. In expression too, the stories and novels appear like detached pieces of poetry, and poetry has the conviviality of prose. For example, the poems show a fine sensitiveness to nature and nature's beauty but often with a pointer to a sense of loneliness and emptiness occasioned by something lost and gone. Thus, as in these extracts from **Barsara Balaka**, first, the implied pointer—

> What a letter he has written!
> In this evening's envelope
> The twelveday moon shines, sparkling,
> Only a few clouds
> A few stars' lamp, scattered,
> Through the chinks of casuarina forest,
> The moaning drum of whistling wind

And the moment filled with anxious agony of waiting .. (p. 69)

Secondly, the clear connotation—

How this could happen ?
The crazy wind of falling flowers
Sucked the earth's nectar in a moment,
The flowers of the garden
Birds, butterflies, blue sky
A few green leaves, distant river
And occasional songs of birds,
All views across my being's window, vanished.
The twilight colour covered
The vast fields of emptiness in front,
And the moonlight of consciousness
Was filled with dense fog in a moment. (p. 77)

Or, differently, in the story *Raga Behaga* too, a similar understanding and similar motivation : "When you open eyes what do you see ? As if the flowers do not have petals, the birds do not sing, the wind does not move smoothly, no rustling in the leaves. As if the whole earth is like a dead valley – dull, static, lifeless... Anusuya fell silent. Everything inside her became quiet. All sound stopped, as if severed from herself she was standing at a place where nobody could reach her. As if a piece of sky fell on her – an empty, callous sky...."

Bijayani, who is settled in Cuttack, is creatively very prolific and has taken recourse to many genres for her creative expression. Her creative career began in early seventies when her first book, a poetry - collection entitled, **Madhyarātrira Kabitā** (The Poems of Midnight, 1972) was published. Her subsequent poetry–collections are, **Suryodaya** (The Sun-Rise, 1980) and **Bhangā Aina** (The Broken Mirror, 1988). Her first novel, **Sikhā Patang** (The Flame and the Insect) was published in 1980. Subsequently so far, she has 7 more novels, including such novels as **Bāgdattā** (The Fiancee, 1986), **Debadāsi** (The Temple Dancer, 1989), **Dāeri** (Diary, 1990), **Ajānata Adhyāya** (The Unknown Chapter, 1991) and **Debaki** (Debaki, 1996). Her story-collections are, **Sarahata** (Hit by an Arrow, 1985), **Chhāi Ālua** (The Light and Shadow, 1989), **Jharakā** (The Window, 1992) and **Smihāsana** (The Throne, 1993), and drama.

Samayar Swar (The Voice of Time, 1989). Bijayini's poems have a pithy structure and they mostly express a sensitive, restless personality, sensitive to the realities of life and restless due to incomprehensible nature of existence around her. These sentiments have also been extended to her stories, which have a social base, but generally deal with psychological complications of human characters, particularly in their relationship to social necessities. But the form in which Bijayini has excelled is novel. The novels generally deal with a number of and varieties of social factors, but always with attitudes of analysis and rationality, and with a desire to justify the moral and benign aspects of life without the trappings of greed, smallness and falsehood. An appropriate example would be **Debadasi**, probably the best known novel of Bijayini.

Debadasi is about the 'debadasi' or the temple-dancers of Lord Jagannath at Puri. This has been an ancient custom, where young girls dedicate themselves to the Lord as His 'wives', and stay as such throughout their lives being supported by the temple, their role being to dance before the Lord, accompanied by music and singing of songs from **Gitagobinda** of Jaydev, the famous 13th century poet. The dancing is done at night, before the Lord retires for the night. The debadasis are called 'maharis' and the dance, 'mahari-dance', which at a later stage gave rise to the well–known classical dance Odissi. In course of time, a custom which initially used to be of deep religious and spiritual content, degenerated into an immoral level, where the debadasis came to be treated more or less as public women, and the whole custom came under disrepute and severe public criticism, and was discontinued after Independence. The novel deals with this custom through the life, conviction and tribulations of a particular debadasi or mahari said to be the last of her tribe. She was Mukta Mahari, a beautiful woman, who had dedicated her life to the Lord at a very young age, and through her goodness of heart, purity of action, dedication to the Lord and competence in dancing, earned the respect of all around, but finally became the victim of smallness, jealousy, and chicanery on the one hand, and adverse situations on the other, to be deprived of the services of the Lord, to lead a poor, neglected, miserable life. But all that did not humble Mukta's great spirit, nor compromise her strong dedication to the Lord, or her purity of action, and she continued as a bright example of a dedicated

soul even after her death. The novelist provides the criticism of the custom only at the end, as a sequel, when the remarkable account of Mukta's life is over. The criticism acknowledges the dedication, purity and goodness, but resents the corruption and hypocrisy that had crept into the custom, through a woman's character who had refused to be the victim of the same. In fact, **Debadasi** remains a singularly interesting book, more so because by a woman writer. Mention can also be made of Bijayini's recent novel which too, through the retelling of the story of Debaki and Krishna continues the exploration and identification of a woman's dedication, conviction and indomitable spirit against extremely adverse situations. Both **Debadasi** and **Debaki** have extended the horizons of contemporary Oriya novel, and have remained as two bright examples of its strength.

Manorama, who belongs to Balasore district, but is settled in Bhubaneswar, began her poetic career in early sixties, when her early poetry books, entitled **Kisalaya** (Bud) and **Bratati** (Creeper), dealing with love, nature and soft feminine sentiments, were published in 1963 and 1966 respectively, before she was 20. Her first important poetry-collection was, significantly, **Phulaphuta Muhurta** (The Moment of Blossoming, 1978), and subsequently, so far, she has 5 poetry collections entitled, **Smruti Srāban Pratibimba** (Memory, Rains and Reflection, 1978), **Swāti Lagna** (The Auspicious Moment of Swati, 1979), **Janharātir Muhan** (The Face of Moonlit Night, 1981), **Ekalā Nadira Gita** (The Song of Lonely River, 1990), **Thare Khāli Dākidele** (Just to Call Once, 1992). In addition, she has three poetry collections for children. Some of the main trends of Manorama's poetry continue to be her love for nature, nature's beauty, memories of her village and people around her, as well as in a general understanding of both the joys and realities of life. Particularly the Baliapal area, adjoining the sea in north Orissa (Balasore), the area to which she belonged, and which was subsequently taken over by the Government of India for Defence projects, remained both a bright and a sore point in her poetry.

A representative poem expressing joy, excitement and anxiety, involving nature with feelings of strangeness, would be *Swati Lagna*, the title poem of the volume **Swati Lagna**:

The message of your coming is everywhere
In air, in leaves, in flowers,
The message in the sky, in the wind
And in the sensitive ponds of the mind...
For your coming the entire time is lightened
In a sparkling spilling fragrant moment.

Similar feelings of joy and happiness seasoned with remorse and melancholy, almost like a personal loss, can be noted in the poet's memories as related to her village:

After a long time
After many years
Once again,
I have come to the village
And to the soil.
I was dreaming of the village
I was asking all around
Again and again.
Now coming to the village
What do I see ?
Dry, like a stunted tree
And the dry, meaningless smiles of children
And painful, helpless look of old men...
I stood silently, in darkness, alone
And listened to the piercing noise of a night bird
Moving in the sky.

At the end, it would be a pleasure to record the remarkable services done by a single Oriya journal to the cause of woman-writing in Orissa, an extraordinary example of love, dedication and singleness of purpose. The journal is **Sucharita**, a monthly, probably the most widely circulated family-journal in Orissa, with a major emphasis on literature. It was started in August, 1975, and by now, it has about 28 years of continuous publication. Each issue contains stories, poems, essays, serialization of novels, translations from other languages etc., besides regular features such as on Health and Beauty Care, popular Psychology, Art and Culture, Films, Cookery and Embroidery, and Household Matters etc. But what is most important is that every piece and every article in the journal is

written by women, and in the last 28 years, apart from other items, it has published more than 1600 short stories, more than 2400 poems, and innumerable features and topical articles, all written by women, and when the list of such women writers is compiled, it includes almost all women writers of any worth who have been writing in Oriya during the last 50 years. To that extent, the contribution of **Sucharita** to the total corpus of woman-writing in post-Independence Orissa is not only remarkable but stupendous, and the whole credit for this work goes to two persons, Sakuntala Panda, its editor, and her intrepid husband, Sri Harihar Panda. Sakuntala, apart from her editorial skill, is a writer on her own merit, and a considerable one. She has so far, four story–collections entitled **Surya Sikhā** (The Sun's Flame, 1997), **Andhakārar Range** (The Colour of Darkness, 1982), **Aneka Dina Pare** (After Many Days,1987), and **Nisiddha Surya** (The Forbidden Sun,1998), and two novels including a very popular novel **Seemāheen** (The Limitless, 1993), which narrates how a young widow slowly established her identity in the society by dint of her singleness of purpose and purity of conscience, a fine document of feminine will and compassion.

(ix)

The above, it may be pointed out, is a select survey of relatively more important women writers of Orissa, and an assessment of major trends. Initially, before the 20th century they were not so many. But with the beginning of the 20th century particularly after Independence, there have been considerable improvement not only in numbers, but also in variety and dimension, and today women writers are not only as many as men writing, but also contribute very significantly to the total richness of modern Oriya literature. Apart from the select list of writers mentioned above, of what follows is also a select list of other women writers, particularly through post-Independence years who have vastly expanded the dimensions of woman-writing in Orissa, and have established it as a strong, viable creative force.

Such writers are : in **Poetry** – Sundaramoni Pattanaik (1922– 2001; **Padmābati**, **Mani Ramayana** etc.), Tulasi Das (b. 1927; **Arghya**, Offering; **Jhadar Jhankār**, The Storm's Brawling ; **Adyārasmi**, The First Rays etc.), Bharati Singh (1931– ?; **Jutha Bhrasta**, Astrayed etc.), Sujata

Priyambada (b. 1942; **Durbādala**, Blade of Grass; **Mahākabi**, The Great Poet; **Mahāmukti**, The Last Deliverance etc.), Sakuntala Devi (b. 1945; **Kācha Jhulana**, Glass Swing; **Bhijā Gayas**, The Wet Flower etc.), Seema Misra (b. 1945; **Sabuja Dharitri**, The Green Earth; **Trunar Trushnā**, The Thirst of Grass etc.), Mamata Das (b. 1947; **Naimisharanya**; **Ekatra Chandra Surya**, The Sun and the Moon Together; **Abak Surya**, The Startled Sun; **Ujjala Upabana**, The Bright Garden etc.), Nirmala Mohanty (b. 1948; **Niraba Nirjyāsa**, Silent Essence; **Amruta Manohi**, Nectar Like Food etc.), Sarojini Sarangi (b. 1951; **Suryasnan**, The Sun–Bathing; **Swetāmbari**, The White Complexioned; **Ātmajā**, One's Own etc.), Aparnna Mohanty (b. 1952; **Atyanta Ātmiyatā**, Deep Intimacy; **Asati**, The Unchasta; **Atithi**, The Guest etc.), Ranjita Nayak (b. 1955; **Asānta Aparānha**, Restless Afternoon; **Jhadar Ākash**, The Stormy Sky etc.), Prabasini Mahakud (b. 1957; **Muhurta Muhurta**, Moments; **Ādharsila**, Resting Stone, etc.), Sucheta Mishra (b. 1965; **Silalipi**, Stone Inscription; **Purbarāga**, Early Affection; **Uttara Pakhya**, Past Generation etc.), Sushree Sangita Mishra (b. 1975; **Nirabatār Swara**, The Voice of Silence; **Nistabda Ākash**, Silent Sky etc.).

In **Short Story** – Tribeni Mohini Devi (b. 1921; **Abagunthan Tale**, Under the Veil; **Ghana Timire**, In Dense Darkness; **Akuhā Kathā**, Unspoken Tale etc.), Nandini Satpathy (b. 1931; **Ketoti Kathā**, A Few Words, **Saptadasi**, The Seven Year Old etc.), Utkalika Das (b. 1931; **Bhābaku Nikata**, Nearness to Thought; **Punnya Mandākini**, Holy Mandakini, etc.), Sudhansubala Panda, (1941–1995; **Naba Barsara Sakāla**, The New Year's Morning; **Kaschit Kāntā**, Where Beloved; **Kantābada**, The Fence of Thorns etc.), Alaka Chand (b. 1943; **Kahai Mana Āre**, O My Mind; **Sthira Nakhyatra**, The Static Star etc.), Indira Das (b. 1946; **Kichhi Sata**, Some Truth; **Nabagunjara**, Nine Forms; **Mana Darpana**, The Mind's Merror etc.), Archana Nayak (b. 1947; **Kete Drusya**, Many Sights; **Arannya Avisār**, The Tryst in the Forest etc.), Jasodhara Misra (b. 1951; **Janharāti**, Moonlit Night; **Rekhāchitra**, The Lineal Portrait; **Pakhijanma**, The Life of a Bird etc.), Gayatri Saraf (b. 1952; **Ālokita Andhār**, Illumined Darkness; **Nijaswa Basanta**, One's Own Spring etc.), Puspanjali Nayak (b. 1954; **Purbarāga**, Early Affection; **Papun Pheri Nāhin**, Papun Has Not Returned; Aswanadir Srota, The Stream of Aswanadi etc.), Sarojini Sahu (b. 1956; **Sukhar Muhānmuhin**,

Face to Face with Happiness; **Nija Gahirare Nije**, One is in One's Trap etc.), Supriya Panda (b. 1957; **Nirvāna** etc.), Jyotsna Routroy (b. 1958; **Potāsraya**, The Harbour ; **Bhinna Bhugol**, Different Geography etc.), Jayanti Rath (b. 1960; **Yātrārambha**, The Beginning of the Journey; **Sabdakhela**, The Game of Words; **Chhāyāpata**, The Reflection etc.), Kabita Barik (b. 1960; **Bhinna Sahar,** A Separate City; **Chhaka**, The Crossing etc.), Susmita Bagchi(b. 1960; **Ākash Jeunthi Kathā Kuhe**, Where the Sky Speaks; **Chhāi Sepākha Manisha**, The Man On the Otherside of the Darkness; **Naibedya**, Offereing etc.), Paramita Satpathy (b. 1965; **Bibidha Aswapna**, Varieties of Dreamlessness; **Bhasākhyara**, Related to Word etc.),

In **Novel** – Adarmoni Das (**Nighancha Swapna**, Compact Dreams; **Durantadisā**, Remote Aim etc.), Kuntala Acharya (b. 1932; **Adina Megha**, Untimely Rain; **Dura Digantara Bhāsā**, The Language of the Distant Horizon etc.), Gayatri Basumallik (b. 1932; **Kāveri**, Kaveri; **Bana Bihangi**, The Wild Bird; **Mādhabir Madhurāti**, The Honey–Moon Day of Madhabi etc.), Bina Mahapatra (b. 1936; **Manamayuri**, Mind Like A Peacock; **Subarna Sita**, The Golden Sita; **Dhusar Dharitri**, The Gray Earth etc.), Punnyaprava Debi (b. 1938; **Sudura Saikat**, The Distant Beach; **Punascha Pruthibi**, The World Again etc.), Khirodra Parija (b. 1938; **Sikhā**, The Flame; **Āgāmi**, The Oncoming; **Balighar**, The House of Sand etc.), Kalpana Kumari Debi (b. 1939; **Kabi**, The Poet; **Nastachhanda**, The Lost Rhythm, **Bana Ketaki**, The Wild Ketaki Flower etc.), Sukamini Nanda (b. 1942; Anuraga, Affection; **Aneka Sunnyata**, Innumerable Emptiness; **Arannyak**, Forest Like etc.), Manasi Das (b. 1944; **Nistabda Kolāhala**, Silent Noise; **Nijenijar Swapna**, One's Own Dreams etc.), Sweta Padmasini Mohanty (b. 1953; **Jatugruha**, The House of Wax; **Mlāna Dihudi**, The Pale Flame etc.), Prabina Mohanty (b. 1957; **Swāti**, Swati; **Nida**, Sleep; **Shyāmal Sugandha**, The Green Fragrance etc.).

In addition, some very distinguished women and well–known social–activists, such as Rama Devi (1899-1985) and Annapurna Moharana (b. 1917) have written their autobiographies, and a group of distinguished academics have written perceptive discussions related to the areas of literature and language, such as Labanya Nayak (b. 1939), Rekha Mohanty (b.1935), Bijayalaxmi Mohanty (b.1945), Archana Nayak, Sanghamitra Mishra (b.1953), Kumudini Mishra (b. 1945), and Indu

Mishra (b.1957). A number of women writers have also distinguished themselves as competent translators. Basant Kumari Devi (1931–1999) was the first–ever Oriya translator to get the Translation Award of the Central Sahitya Akademi. Other women writers who have contributed significantly to translation are Nirodprava Pattanaik (b. 1926), Jayanti Pattanaik (b.1931), Niharbala Mohanty (b.1935), Bijayalaxmi Mohanty and Sakuntala Baliarsingh (b.1948).

As can be seen, the Oriya women writers have excelled in poetry, story and novel, and in that order, though they have attempted different genres of literary writing and have contributed significantly thereto. On the whole they manifest a high degree of competence and intelligence, and their involvement and creative reaction to factors of existence can be favourably compared with similar body of writing anywhere else in India.

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2

MODERN ORIYA LITERATURE : A SURVEY

What is termed as the 'modern age' in Oriya literature is supposed to have begun in the later part of the nineteenth century. That was the time when new attitudes and awareness developed that put up a serious challenge to the traditional ways of living, learning and evaluation.

As elsewhere in India, so also in Orissa, the British administrators got significant support from the Christian missionaries, and they worked together not only to consolidate the new administration, but also in the spread of new English education and cultural understanding, and newer ways of employment and production. The first printing press in Orissa was started at Cuttack, in 1837, by the missionaries, who took advantage of new printing media to prepare primers in Oriya, to write books on Oriya grammar, to compile Oriya dictionaries and to start Oriya journals, such as **Jnānaruna** (1849), **Prabodh Chandrikā** (1856) and **Arunodaya** (1861) with the avowed aim of promoting socio–religious literature.

The missionaries also took initiative to start new vernacular schools, including an anglo-vernacular school at Cuttack (1823) which was the first ever English medium school in Orissa. The schools were first attempts towards inculcating new Western-modelled education which slowly took roots among the younger generation Oriyas of the time, and became instrumental in changing their attitudes and taste towards life in general and literature in particular, Subsequently, Government English Schools were opened at Puri (1839), Cuttack (1841), and Balasore (1853) and the first college - Ravenshaw College - was started at Cuttack in 1867, and the first training school for teachers, the Cuttack Normal School, started functioning from January, 1869. The records show, by 1881, Orissa had 8035 Primary Schools with a student strength of 96, 321 ; 23 Middle English Schools and 35 Middle Vernacular Schools; 6 High Schools and 2 Colleges including Ravenshaw College, and one at Berhampur. The school management and inspection were improved and organized, printed books were introduced and use of paper and slates replaced the old system of writing on palm-leaf and

with hard chalk. The schools developed the new awareness at a formative stage which had not only a steady growth but was consolidated in the last two decades of the 19th century.

Related development in printing press primarily served three purposes, that is, printing of journals, preparation of text books and development of literature. The missionaries had started the first press in 1837. But a real breakthrough came in 1866, the year of the Great Famine in Orissa, when the Cuttack Printing Press was started at Cuttack, by a few educated Oriyas, mostly at the initiative of Gauri Sankar Ray (1838–1917), an intrepid young man. This was immediately followed up by Phakirmohan Senapati (1847–1918), a bright young writer from Balasore, who established a printing press at Balasore in 1868. In quick succession, printing presses started to come up all over Orissa, in almost all the major towns, and by the end of the century there were fifteen such presses.

Gaurishankar also started a weekly Oriya journal, entitled **Utkal Dipika**, simultaneously with the press (1866), which he continued to edit till his death, and which survived even after him, till 1936. It provided leadership to the social, cultural, and intellectual life of contemporary Orissa, and became the rallying ground for new ideas, and the starting point for other newer journals to emerge, particularly under the patronage of feudatory kings and rich zamindars, such as Maharaja Basudev Sudhal Deb of Bamanda, Maharaja Sri Ramachandra Bhanja of Mayurbhanja, and Raja Baikunthanath Dey of Balasore. The important journals were, **Bodhadayini O Baleswar Sambād Bāhika** (1869), **Utkal Pravā** (1873), and **Utkal Sāhitya** (1883). The journals had many difficulties, such as in funding, production, and marketing. But the general effect was electrifying, and a substantial rapport was established between the thinking elite and the mass of reading public as has happened never before.

A similar awakening took place in religious-reform movements, particularly through the impact of the Brahmo Movement from early seventies. The Utkal Brahmo Samaj was formed at Cuttack in 1869, and between 1881 and 1890 a number of such Samaj or societies were started at different places in Cuttack and Puri districts. The Brahmos established several schools, produced books and journals, and undertook

social service according to their ideals. On the whole, the movement promoted community kinship and helped to lessen social rigours, particularly for women. An illustrious young reformer was Peary Mohan Acharya (1852–1881) who established a school named the Cuttack Academy, at Cuttack (1875), which was subsequently renamed as Peary Mohan Academy, after Acharya's death. The other distinguished persons who joined the movement were Madhusudan Rao (1853–1912), poet and educational administrator, and Biswanath Kar (1864–1934), the illustrious editor of **Utkal Sahitya**, the most influential literary journal of the time.

The later nineteenth century was a very important formative time for India, particularly from the point of view of emerging nationalistic spirit. The Revolt of 1857 was both a culmination and a beginning - culmination of continual popular resistances to prolonged British colonization of Indian economy and society, and a beginning of newer types of mass movement that finally ended with Independence in 1947. The Revolt of 1857 was immediately followed by other movements, such as Indigo Revolt of 1859–60 in Bengal, the agrarian unrest during the 1870s and early 1880s in East Bengal, agrarian outbreaks in Poona and Ahmednagar districts in 1875, Mappila outbreaks in Malabar, and Kuka Revolt in Punjab in 1872 etc. till the Indian National Congress was founded in December, 1885, by 72 political workers, which became the first organized expression of Indian nationalism on an all India scale. From the beginning, the Congress was conceived not as a party but as a movement, and among other things its main objectives were to lay the foundations of a secular and democratic national movement, and to develop and propagate an anti–colonial nationalist ideology. Great newspapers of the time, such as **Hindu**, **Kesari**, **Amrita Bazar Patrika**, **Sudharak**, **Indian Mirror**, **Voice of India** etc. came up ably edited by fearless journalists who were also important leaders of the movement, such as G. Subramaniyayer, B.G. Tilak, Sisir Kumar Ghose, G.K. Gokhle, N.N. Sen and Dadabhai Naroji etc. The Oriya elite of the later 19th century joined the grand resurgent movement of the time.

Interestingly, the Great Famine of 1866 provided the first powerful impetus to the rise of Oriya nationalism. On the one hand it reflected many dimensions of contemporary Indian nationalism, and on the other,

it tried hard to establish a regional and linguistic identity of its own. Initially, it was a movement against the dominance of more powerful and stronger neighbours, and in support of an amalgamation of Oriya speaking tracts under a separate Orissa province. It was only at a later stage it allied itself with the ideals and purposes of Indian National Congress and participated in the struggles for emancipation of the country from the foreign rule Two great leaders of the time, Madhusudan Das (1848–1934) and Gopabandhu Das (1877–1928) were the pioneering spirits of the new resurgence.

A cumulative result of all that have been pointed out above, was seen most eloquently in the new Oriya literature that emerged in the later part of the 19th century. Whereas the earlier literature was mostly in poetry, it now branched out into different genres, such as fiction, drama, short story, essay, biography and travelogue, apart from poetry. Even in poetry, newer and hitherto unknown forms were imported, such as, the sonnet, ode, elegy and satire etc, and in the place of long narrative poems or kavyas, common in Oriya poetry, shorter, more personal poems expressing the individual's joys, sufferings and intimate concern for life, as well as contemplative analytical poems on man's existence and predicament, came to be written. The themes changed, the attitudes differed, and the change was heralded among others, by such pioneering spirits as, Radhanath Roy (1848–1908) and Madhusudan Rao in poetry, Phakirmohan Senapati in novel, and Ramsankar Ray (1858–1917) in drama. They were all well–versed in western literature and purposely moved away from the traditional preoccupations related to devotion and love, and from earlier Bhakti and Vaishnavite frame, towards a new and greater comprehension of socio–cultural cum political realities, and to that extent effected the first significant formulations of change in taste and sensibility in Oriya literature.

(ii)

Radhanath Roy wrote long poems, long narrative stories of love and romance, some of which were freely adapted from western sources and retold in intimate local contexts and background. In fact Radhanath's importance lay in a number of factors, First, he wrote the first epic in Oriya, **Mahājātrā** (The Last Journey, 1896), the first satire in Oriya,

Darabār (The Court, 1897), the first long descriptive poems – **Chilikā** (Chilika, 1892) and **Chandrabhāgā** (Chandrabhaga, 1866) etc. Secondly, his poetry gave almost a total exposure of Orissa, that is, Orissa's places, rivers, mountains etc, as well as its flora, fauna and the history and heritage. Thirdly, the poet's sensitiveness to nature and to nature's beauty, both in its details and expansiveness, was almost electrifying. Not that Oriya poets were not aware of nature before, but Radhanath's sensitiveness, particularly the way he identified nature as a part of one's own being, subject to complications of one's own livingness, was a new thing and added a new dimension to Oriya poetry. Fourthly, the pride in one's own land has been converted into a pride for one's own country – an intense nationalistic spirit, and a great regret that such a beautiful country has come to be desecrated where basic human and moral values have been compromised. Radhanath served in the Orissa Education Department for about 40 years (1864–1903) of which he became the chief towards the end of his career. Thus writing for him was both a matter of desire as well as a promotional activity, necessary to provide necessary renovation to the new education in Orissa. Radhanath started writing from early seventies, and one of his earliest books was a prose tract, the first of its type in Oriya, entitled **Bibeki** (the Moralist, 1873), on morals and manners, and kept up his habit till the year of his death (1908).

Madhusudan Rao was a close friend of Radhanath, and like him he too served in senior posts in Orissa Education Department, and like him too, he actively participated and promoted the new education and new literature in Orissa. Radhanath had written an Oriya grammar for schools. But Madhusudan wrote a primer **Barnabodha** and prepared a number of prose anthologies namely **Sahitya Kusum** and **Sahitya Prasanga** etc. that continued to become the school texts for many years to come, and set a model for such books. Again, unlike Radhanath, he did not write long narrative poems or kavyas. On the other hand, he excelled in short lyrics and sonnets, that were mainly published between 1875 and 1908. Some of his important poetic collections were **Chhāndamālā** (A Garland or Rhymes, 1980–81), **Basantagāthā** (The Ballads of Spring, 1901), **Utkal Gatha** (Songs of Orissa, 1903) and **Kusumānjali** (Flower Offerings, 1903). Madhusudan was a deeply religious man, well-versed in the

Upanishads, Brahmo by conviction and a leader of the Brahmo community in Orissa. His poetry as a whole was responsible, as Radhanath's was not, for introducing a mystico-religious complexion into Oriya poetry. Two good examples to this effect were **Rusiprāne Debābatarana** (The Descent of Divinity in the Saint's Soul, 1891) and **Himāchale Udaya Utsav** (The Celebration of Dawn in the Himalayas, 1911), two comparatively long poems. Madhusudan's poetry had three dimensions, one overlapping the other. First, it provided a poetic understanding of divine existence in man's life; secondly, a sharp sensitiveness to nature and nature's beauty, particularly rural nature; and thirdly, patriotic and nationalistic sentiments related to one's own country and nation. All these together, along with his continuous emphasis on human values and the quality of contemplation, provided a remarkable structural strength to Madhusudan's poetry at a time when they were much needed, and earned him a unique position in modern Oriya literature ('Bhakta Kabi').

Phakirmohan Senapti like Radhanath was born at Balasore, and though he never got into Orissa Education Service, he subsequently became a good friend of Radhanath and Madhusudan and built his house at Cuttack as the other two had done. Differently he almost entirely did administrative jobs, particularly in ex–feudatory States. Phakirmohan's literary career was begun as a poet, when he translated the Ramayana and the Mahabharat into Oriya, and wrote a kavya, entitled **Budhabatar Kavya**, based on the life of Lord Budha. Additionally, he wrote a number of short poems or lyrics on personal themes and emotions which were later collected in a few volumes

But Phakirmohan's real debut in literature was in novels, short stories and autobiography. The novels were, **Chhamāna Āthaguntha** (Six and One Third Acres, 1899), **Lachhamā** (Lachhama, 1901), **Māmu** (The Uncle 1913) and **Prāyaschit** (Penance, 1915), and thematically they covered a period of about 170 years, from about the middle of the 18th century till about the second decade of the 20th, during which Orissa passed from the Muslim rule to the Maratha rule (1751) and finally to the British (1803). The novel **Lachhama** was a historical novel but the other three as well as the group of short stories, dealt incisively with contemporary social realities, and subtle yet inevitable social changes.

Phakirmohan was aware of the corroding nature of the shift, and his writings reflected the contemporary dimensions in exploitation, misery, greed and selfishness, and provided a wonderful portrait gallery of characters, both good and bad, both from among the highly placed and the lowliest, particularly women characters, many of whom have become archetypes.

But probably the best part of Phakirmohan's work was his use of language. It was almost, to borrow a comparison from English, Shakespearean, and in contrast to the Sanskrit-based polite language used by Radhanath and Madhusudan, it had the remarkable vitality of a colloquial speech full of proverbs, saws and visual images which had been nourished by a 1000-year-old ripe village culture. Phakirmohan's novels and stories as well as to a large extent his autobiography, set a new and strong trend towards the portrayal of social realism, and his strong sense of humour coupled with subtle irony, provided a completely new structure to Oriya prose, discursive and analytical, and yet highly suggestive and poetic, which set a new model in writing to be followed by subsequent generations.

Ramsankar Roy, the youngest of the group, born like Radhanath, in a domiciled Bengali family, was early motivated like others, to challenge the contemporary domination of Bengali literature and culture, and to establish Oriya literature on its own. He was well-versed in western literature and western drama, and by design set to give a shape and identity to Oriya drama. Ramsankar began his literary career with a novel, entitled **Bibāsini** (Bibasini, 1892), one of the earliest novels in Oriya, related to socio-political unrest, chaos and tyranny during the Maratha rule, but quickly changed over to drama, and his first drama **Kānchi Kāveri** was staged in 1880. It was a historical drama which took its theme from a popular story about the victory of the 15th century Oriya emperor Purusottam Dev over the ruler of Kanchi, and Purusottam's subsequent marriage to the ruler's daughter. Ramsankar continued to write dramas for another 37 years, till his death, and in all wrote about 30 plays of different types, incorporating the comic, romantic and satiric modes, and largely motivated towards social reforms. Some of his more important plays were, in addition to **Kanchi Kaveri**, **Banabala** (The Forest Maid, 1882) loosely historical, written under the influence

of Shakespeare's 'Tempest', **Kalikāla** (The Age of Kali, 1883) on the evils of drinking, **Budhābara** ("The Old Bridegroom, 1892) on the evils of old men marrying young ladies, **Bisamodak** (The Doze of Poison, 1900) on the fall of an aristrocratic zamindar family due to idleness and indebtedness, **Jugadharma** (The Manners of the Time, 1902) on the victimization of farmers by the Govt. and the rich, and **Lilābati** (Lilabati, 1912) on how to glorify and improve one's own country through reforms and sacrifice etc. Ramshankar put in songs in his plays, used blank verse and prose for effect, and tried to make drama a viable form of entertainment and serious discussion. His plays set standards and influenced Oriya drama in subsequent decades.

(iii)

The new literature that emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century came to acquire viability and distinct identity from the beginning of the twentieth century. The trends set by the earlier writers, such as, related to love for and pride in one's own country and nation, and sensitiveness to one's own emotions and to nature, as well as an awareness about the changing social realities etc. opened up new avenues for the new and newer writers. They followed and developed all forms, such as, poetry, fiction, drama etc, but the form that came to acquire the most important position in about 50 years prior to Independence was poetry.

Both Radhanath and Madhusudan had initiated the movement, both in long and short units, as well as in themes, attitudes and motivations. On the whole the inspiration provided by Radhanath and Madhusudan counted, though the essential inspiration (including even the poetry of Radhanath and Madhusudan) was in the 19th century English Romantic poetry and in the poets such as, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Byron and Tennyson, which could be variously seen as animating the verse of this period. By itself and in contrast to ancient Oriya poetry (poetry prior to Radhanath) this amounted to the establishment of a new taste, new attitude and on the whole a different understanding of the process and manner of life. It would be convenient to consider the important poets subsequent to Radhanath and Madhusudan in four groups seen more or less chronologically.

In the first group we have two contemporaries of Radhanath and Madhusudan. They were Gangadhar Meher (1862-1924) and Nandakishore Bal (1875-1928). Gangadhar was born in Sambalpur district in humble surroundings. But by dint of his merit and creative power he rose to become one of the best loved poets of the time. Like Radhanath he excelled in writing long, narrative poems or kavyas, but unlike him his sources were not so much in the West as in Indian mythology and Sanskrit literature. Some of his early kavyas were **Indumati** (Indumati, 1893) based on the sorrowful love-tale between Aja and Indumati from 'Raghuvansa' of Kalidas, and **Kichaka Baddha** (The Killing of Kichaka, 1903) from the Mahabharat, But the poet's best work, and one of the best poetical works in Oriya literature, was . later kavya entitled **Tapaswini** (The Nun, 1914). It dealt with the life of Sita during her banishment in Valmiki's hermitage, a largely original work though based on the Ramayana, where Sita's physical and moral beauties are described in an atmosphere of deep pathos and compassion, and in the midst of nature which is fully animated and living. The poet's equally popular work was another later kavya, **Pranayaballari** (The Creepers of Love, 1915) which dealt with the story of Dushyanta and Sakuntala, and was written in a highly mellifluous manner. Gangadhar's language was simple and lyrical, and his talent was homely and intimate.

The second poet Nandakishor, 27 years junior to Radhanath, wrote at least three long, narrative poems in the manner of Radhanath. He too, like Radhanath, served in the Education Department, travelled widely, and had intimate knowledge of Orissa's rural life. His long poems, where the themes were taken either from mythology or history, put emphasis on sorrowful life, almost reminiscent of Radhanath's poetic manner. But Nandakishor's reputation as a fine poet rested on the large number of lyrics or short poems that he wrote. These were collected in eleven volumes, mostly written between 1900 and 1916, and excelled in intimate perceptions of rural life, rural nature and rural people. Some of the more important volumes were, **Pallichitra** (Pictures of a Village, 1898), **Nānābāyāgita** (Nursery Rhymes, 1915), **Nirjharini** (The Stream, 1900), **Basanta Kokila** (The Cuckoo of Spring, 1901) and **Prabhāt Sangita** (Morning Song, 1912) etc. Nandakishor's poetry had almost continuous references to rural situations. But he was also unhappy at the conservative

social customs, manners and superstitions, as well as the then condition of Orissa and the Oriyas. Nandakishor's poems had an underlying meditative approach, almost as in Madhusudan's poetry, and had a mystic, contemplative strength. In fact his perception of rural life and rural nature constituted a departure from the tradition of Radhanath–Madhusudan poetry and earned him prime distinction as a poet.

The second group consisted of three persons – a group of poet–reformer–politicians in whom the contemporary spirit of nationalism which was latent so far in Oriya poetry and literature, had its first, most outspoken expressions. They were Gopabandhu Das, Nilakantha Das (1884 – 1967) and Godabaris Mishra (1886 – 1956), and their combined creative work – substantial body of literature done mainly between 1909 and 1925 – almost constituted a movement, popularly known as the 'Satyabādi Movement'. The name originated from a place called Satyabadi, near Puri, where these people under the leadership of Gopabandhu established a rural residential school in 1909, which not only attracted independent-minded youngmen and raised a community of dedicated writers, fighters and workers, but also became a centre emanating reformistic ideas and aggressive nationalistic sentiments.

Many of the well-known poems of Gopabandhu were written during his spells of imprisonment, particularly during the years 1923 and 1924. His earliest work was **Abakāsa Chintā** (Thoughts in Leisure, 1899), and a larger volume containing poems written in 1923, 1924, was entitled **Bandira Ātmakathā** (The Autobiography of a Prisoner). Many of the poems in both the volumes had socio-political motivatiors and had direct references to prison-life. An important poem was *Bandira Swadeshchinta* (The Patriotic Thoughts of a Prisoner) which mingled autobiographical elements with intense homesick thoughts of a prisoner from inside his prison-cell.

Nilakantha's most famous book was **Konārke** (At Konarka, 1919). It had two parts, one a sequence of short poems entitled **Rāmachandire Rāti O Sakāla** (The Night and Morning at Ramachandi), Ramachandi being the place of Goddess Ramachandi, very close to Konark; and the other a long narrative poem, a kåvya, entitled **Māyādevi** (Maya Devi), Both the parts relate to the famous sun-temple at Konark. The first part records the poet's experiences and feelings in a stormy full moon night

and the subsequent morning at Konark, where the poet had led, as a teacher, a group of boys for excursion. The feelings range from a sympathetic sorrow for the boys who had lost the comfort of their homes to glorious, nationalistic thoughts about Orissa's past, the tone being a mixture of rhetorical exultation with melancholic sorrow, and the vision was of a happy bright land in spite of fierce storms and darkness. The second part is an account of a tragic love story, a fictional account, between Narasimha Dev. the young prince of Orissa and Maya Devi, the young beautiful daughter of a banished chieftain, and narrates how the death of Maya Devi prompted Narasimha Dev after he became the king, to build the sun-temple at Konark in the 13th century in her memory. The book was written in a racy, idiomatic language and remains a landmark in Oriya poetry.

Godabaris excelled in writing lyrical poems and ballads. Particularly the ballads were almost new in Oriya and they dealt with various local tales of heroism and adventure as well as of joys and sorrows of common people. His poems were mostly collected in three volumes, **Kalikā** (The Bud, 1921), on personal joys and sorrows, **Kisalaya** (Blossoms, 1922), and **Ālekhikā** (Pictures, 1923) that contained most of his ballads. A very popular poem of the poet was entitled *Kālijāi* (Kalijai). It was a story poem, about how a young girl named Jai, while going to her husband's house across lake Chilika in a boat, with her father, got drowned as the boat capized in a storm, and who subsequently became the goddess 'Kalijai' whose temple now stands in the middle of Chilika and who, it is said, looks after the safety of the wayfarers across Chilika. The poem succeed in transforming the sense of sorrow, arising out of the drowning of a young bride, into a sense of beauty – beauty of nature and atmosphere. In a different mood the poet writes of the miserable condition of Orissa, particularly about the fragmentation of Oriya speaking tracts in anger and disgust – "The head is cut off from the trunk/ and the feet lie elsewhere. The hands lie and rot/ and what the eyes see is dead". Godabaris, Nilakantha and Gopabandhu, as a whole, in spite of their elements of romantic wistfulness, infused contemporary consciousness into Oriya poetry – a consciousness of nationalistic agitation and unrest on the one hand, and on the other, largely moralistic ideas that were motivated by broad liberal human ideals.

The third group comprised of two poets who wrote independently of each other, but had essential similarities. They brought clarity and popularity to the trends set by Radhanath, Madhusudan and Nandakishore, and at the same time, like Satyabadi poets, reflected the fervour of contemporary nationalistic and patriotic sentiments, with the difference that one of them, Laxmikant, seasoned his poems with socio-political themes with sly humour and satire – a distant recognition of the lead given by Radhanath's **Darabār**. The poets were Padmacharan Pattnaik (1885-1956) and Laxmikant Mohapatra (1889–1953). Padmacharan was a lyric poet who wrote on love, trasience and nature along with occasional patriotic exhortations. His poetical volumes were entitled, **Padmapākhudā** (The Petals of Lotus, 1928), **Suryamukhi** (The Sun Flower), **Golāpaguchha** (The Rose Bunches) and **Asa Manjari** (The Blossoms of Hope) etc., which were popular texts in schools for many years. The poet's most popular poem with a wistful, melancholic tone about Orissa's past was *Dhauli Pāhāda* (The Dhauli Hill, 1920) which dealt with high patriotic sentiments related to Asoka's battle against Kalinga at Dhauli (B.C.261), on the bank of the river Daya, near Bhubaneswar. Laxmikant was known as a fine lyricist and parodist, and he wrote on such contemporary topics as non–cooperation, salt march, election, and cabinet–formation etc., as well as at times, on individual political leaders, often with humour and irony but with an underlying motive to improve human conditions as far as possible. The poet's well-known poetical volume **Jiban Sangita** (Songs of Life), a collection of 77 lyrics, has a semi-mystical perception of beauty and divinity. But the volumes entitled **Lalikā** (Parody) and **Rasa Sahitya** (Literature of Pleasure) were fine parodies of popular ancient songs of Orissa, including famous Champu songs of Baladev Rath (18th century) on Radhạ-Krishna theme. His famous patriotic exhortation, in the poem *Bande Utkal Janani* (I Worship Thee Mother Utkal) subsequently became an almost national song of Orissa.

The fourth group consisted of five poets and together they developed a distinct poetic personality that, on the one hand, continued major aspects of Radhanath-Madhusudan poetic tradition, and on the other, showed flexibility to subtle and delicate changes of emotion. The poets were Kuntala Kumari Sabat (1900–1938), Kalindi Charan Panigrahi

(1901– 1991), Baikunthanath Pattnaik (1904–1979), Mayadhar Mansingha (1905–1974) and Radhamohan Gadanayak (1911–1999). They excelled in writing lyrics or personal poems, and concentrated on such things as nature, love, adoration of beauty, and spiritual and mystical feelings, as well as on such other factors as emotional patriotic exhortations and soft sympathy for the poor and the downtrodden, and as a whole their poetry ushered in a good deal of new vigour and freshness in the contemporary atmosphere.

The eldest Ms. Sabat, who died early, was by profession a doctor and spent most of her time outside Orissa, in Delhi. Though her poetry was full of patriotic sentiments and a pride for the Oriyas, yet she was basically a mystic poet and expressed such sentiments as related to love, nature, and to the unknown lover and the coordinator of life – a distant echo of Madhusudan Rao. Her important poetry collections include **Anjali** (The Offering, 1922) **Uchhwāsa** (The Emotions, 1926), **Archanā** (Worship, 1927), **Sphulinga** (The Spurt, 1929) and **Āwāhana** (The Call, 1930) etc.

Panigrahi wrote most of his poetry, almost all of which were short lyrics, in the twenties and thirties, and they were collected in such volumes as **Manenāhin** (Can't' Remember), **Chhuritiye Lodā** (A Knife Needed), **Khaynika Satya** (Momentary Truth) and **Mahādipa** (The Great Lamp) etc., published between 1933 and 1938. Feelings related to love and nature, memories of the past, hopes for a bright future for all, and an anger against the small, mean life around him were his main poetic themes. Thus for example, a poem like *Manenahin* lists with a melancholic pang how sweet graces of the past are forgotten and sweet faces no longer exist. Differently, a poem like *Mahadipa* proclaims how the light of hope will spread in the universe like the light from the Great Lamp lit in honour of Lord Shiva and will dispel darkness and inequality.

Baikunthanath's poems too, were specially remarkable for their quality of imagination. They were mainly collected in three volumes, entitled **Arunasri** (The Graces of Dawn), **Kāvya Sanchayana** (Collection of Poetry, 1943) and **Uttarāyana** (Movements Towards the North, 1963) and were mostly written in a period of about 25 years, beginning from early twenties. A general perception of nature, love and beauty could be

seen in many of his poems. In addition, a mystic contemplation of life is presented by the side of an awareness of the hard realities of life. Structurally, his poems have an entertaining wholeness and have a perfect sense of rhyme and rhythm. A good example is *Jātrāsangita* (The Songs of Journey) from **Kāvya Sanchayana** which is lyrical as well as mystical in tone, and narrates the protagonist's desires to move from a rotting, decaying life to blossoming nature of eternal beauty and eternal life.

Mansingha, in comparison to other poets, was very prolific. He wrote 6 long poems and innumerable short poems which were collected in 14 volumes. As in others so in him, the general approach to life was one of romantic understanding and this is seen in his repeated references to nature and nature's beauty, to love, and to semi-mystical perception of a power that rolls through all nature and controls all life. Such volumes were **Dhupa** (Incense, 1931), **Hema Sasya** (Golden Crop, 1933), **Hema Puspa** (Golden Flower, 1935), **Akhyata** (Rice Particles), **Jiban Chitā** (Life's Pyre, 1946), and **Krusa** (The Cross, 1956) etc., all collections of short poems. In addition, Mansingha's poetry also projected a strong socio-political consciousness, both analytical and at times, mildly satirical, and mostly written at a later phase of his career, particularly after Independence. Such volumes are **Bāputarpan** (Offerings to Bapu, 1948), **Swarājyāsrama** (Swarajyasrama, 1952) the title being the name of the headquarters of the Orissa Congress Party at Cuttack, and the kavya **Kamalāyan** (The Story of Kamala, 1947) largely a humanist document. Mansingha's two popular poems may be noted here. One entitled *Mahānadire Jyostnā Vihār*, related to a boat–journey in a moonlit night in the river Mahanadi near Cuttack, which combined the poet's sensitive feelings for nature with a patriotic recollection of the country's past, ending in a semi–mystical perception reminiscent of Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey'. The second is related to an imaginary dance -sequence of Konarka statues at the ruined temple of Konarka, where melancholic emotions are associated with the ruin and waste of a rich beauty.

Radhamohan Gadanayak, the youngest of the group, was probably most well-known for his lyric and rhyming structures. His first published work was a poetic play on Kalidas (1933). Subsequently his poems were collected in about ten volumes, among which **Kavya Nāyikā** (Poetry's Heroine, 1945), remains the best. As in others,

particularly as in Mansingha, so too in Gadanayak, the poetic themes range from reactions to love and nature, to semi-mystical perception of an unknown spirit. He has also frequently written ballads, remniscent of the ballads of Godabaris Misra, where incidents and characters have been taken from Orissa's as well as India's past. Such volumes were **Smaranikā** (In Memory), **Pasupakhir Kabya** (Poetry of Animals and Birds), and **Utkalikā** (About Utkal) etc. A poem which typically shows the poet's preoccupation with love, nature, lyricism etc. is *Mausumi* (The Monsoon), which has distant echoes of Shelley's 'Ode to the Westwind'.

In a period of about 30 years preceding Independence, that is, in the twenties, thirties and forties, Oriya literary scene was full of activity. That was also the time when the atmosphere was charged with powerful socio-political movements. From inside the country, with the advent of Gandhiji, the struggle for freedom had taken a decisive turn, and from outside, the impact of Bolshevik Revolution and Soviet Russia along with new Marxist ideas had a powerful influence on the young minds. Besides, the continuing agitation for a separate province of Orissa, and a separate identity for the Oriyas, came to a partial fulfilment in 1936, when a separate province of Orissa was formed. These cumulatively contributed to a churning of mind, particularly of those who were sensitively and creatively effective. In addition there were literary heritages and influences. Thus the heritage of earlier Oriya poets beginning from Radhanath and Madhusudan and through Satyabadi poets, was a rich and complex growth which provided models for the poets of the period, who generally adopted its structure and trend. Secondly, the influence of contemporary Bengali poetry, particularly of Tagore, in whom most of the poets were well-versed, along with the general influence of the nineteenth century English Romantic poetry, which came as a part of the training and education, shaped attitudes and poetic motivations and provided fruitful meeting grounds. The writers took pleasure in organizing themselves in movements and associations, and two such activities may be noted here.

One was called 'Sabuja Andolana' or Green Movement, and it was conceived as a poetic movement towards the end of the twenties, mainly by Kalindi Charan and Baikunthanath along with some of their friends,

pre-eminent among whom was Annada Sankar Ray, who later migrated to Bengal where he made name as a considerable writer in Bengali. They brought out a manifesto and called themselves *Sabuja* (The Green) – a direct reminder of *sabuja* in Tagore's popular poem. They brought out a poetry-anthology entitled **Sabuja Kabita** (1931) which had poems by five poets including Kalindicharan, Baikunthanath, and Annada Sankar. This was followed up by a journal entitled **Jugabina**. (The Lire of the Time, 1933) which was edited by Harihar Mohapatra, a member of the group, and which was posed as the mouthpiece of Sabuja Sameeti. It had a good deal of influence on the youngsters.

The second, and probably more vocal, was 'Nabajuga Sahitya Sansad' (The Literary Association of the New Age). Whereas Sabuja's origin was mainly literary, Nabajuga Sahitya Sansad was conceived as an offshoot of the prevailing socio–political ideas, that is, the prevailing, progressive, Marxist ideas that had emananted from Eastern Europe. It was organized by a group of politically left–oriented writers, headed by Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi (1907–1943), brother of Kalindi Charan Panigrahi, who was incidentally founder-secretary of the Communist Party of Orissa. They had also a monthly mouthpiece entitled **Adhunik** (The Modern), which Bhagabati edited. They proclaimed against art for art's sake and declared to make literature an agent of revolution and social change. The inaugural song of the Sansad's first meeting (November–December, 1935) almost rhetorically set the tone for the self-conceived new role of the Association – "Awake, the youth of the New Age / Awake and break your fetters / Pour your heart's blood / Spread fire in million lives / Break all bounds / Dry all tears / Destroy all castes / Unite all countries / Blow the bugle of humanity / Let sorrows go / Arise / Arise / Awake, awake."

The poet who wrote the inaugural song and provided the take-off ground for the new 'progressive' poetry was Anant Pattanaik (1919–1987). But Pattanaik's poetic career went beyond the Sansad's period, which petered out by mid-forties, whereas his career continued for another 30/35 years. But by and large, his attitudes remained Marxism-oriented and at that early stage he had significantly added to the poetic voice of the Nabajuga Sahitya Sansad. Similar was the case with Sachidananda Routray (b.1913). His poetic career, like Pattanaik's, had

begun in the early thirties, and like his too, it extended beyond Independence, and he too like Pattanaik, was motivated by the Marxist ideals. Pattanaik's poems were collected in a number of volumes, and among other elements they showed a keen sympathy for the poor and downtrodden, and a strong awareness of the agony and suffering inherent in the contemporary realities of life. Routray had also a number of volumes. His first volume entitled **Pātheya** (For the Road) was published in 1931, and by 1949, he had at least 7 volumes of poetry, most of which were motivated by left-oriented ideas. One of his poems particularly, a long poem entitled **Baji Rout** (Baji Rout, 1943) that celebrated the heroism of a young boatman boy who, it is said, chose to sacrifice his life in defiance, during the ex–State's agitation for freedom, was written in a meditative-rhetorical vein and in a symbolic structure, to celebrate the undying human soul that triumphs over gloom and destruction, only to rise into a new life of universal hope and liberty. At the same time both Pattanaik and Routray wrote such poems that were predominantly romantic in tone and structure and were generally given to a contemplation of love, nature and rural niceties. Routray's well known poetical volumes, in this vein were **Pallisree** (Rural Graces, 1941) and **Bhānumatira Desa** (The Land of Bhanumati, 1949).

Both the Sabuja movement and the Progressive Literature movement had their initial strength as well as their newness and freshness faded out by mid–forties. Yet their motivations and attitudes as well as the rhetorical components of their style remained as subterranean forces in the totality of the changed poetic structure after Independence. It was a long journey from Radhanath–Madhusudan tradition – a journey which had strong links with the past, and yet looked forward to new dispensation to come in future.

(iv)

Poetry was an important, probably the most important expressive form before Independence. But other forms also flourished, and that too in large measure. In fiction, Phakirmohan's example encouraged a number of writers, including some important poets, to try their hands at fiction and story writing. But even before Phakirmohan there were at least three novels. They were **Bibāsini** by Ramasankar Roy, **Padmamāli**

(Padmamali, 1888) by Umesh Ch. Sarkar, and **Bhima Bhuyān** (Bhima Bhuyan, 1898) by Gopal Ballav Das. The first two had elements of adventure and romance in historical context and highlighted exploitation, torture, misgovernment, greed and selfishness on the one hand, and the need of social ethics, morality and faith in God on the other. The last one had certain uniqueness in the sense that it dealt with people lower down in the social scale, particularly with the Bhuyan community, and gave a graphic account of their social life, manners and patterns of living, the first such novel about the tribals in Oriya. But novel was given definite attitudes and was established as a major viable form in Oriya by Phakirmohan who was taken up as a model by subsequent writers.

Such writers were, pre-eminently, Nandakishor Bal, Chintamani Mohanty (1867–1943), and Kuntala Kumari Sabat, all of whom were otherwise established as poets. Bal wrote a single novel entitled **Kanakalatā** (Kanakalata) which he took about 15 years to complete (1913–25). It was a fine portrayal of contemporary Oriya social life, of two well-to-do families in intimate rural surroundings, and focussed on social conservatism and superstition, particularly such social evils as dowry and widowhood. Chintamani and Sabat had each five novels, and they too had strong social motivations. Thus Chintamani dealt with such themes as deception, greed, immorality, selfishness and religious corruption, and pointed out how all that can lead the society and the individual to decay and disintegration unless otherwise buoyed up by high moral ideas and related action. Sabat, on the other hand, focussed on women, and pointed out their essential strength of character along with how they had often been victims of motivated social actions. Her novels had a strong reformistic trend, and she too opposed child marriage, advocated widow remarriage, wrote vividly against poverty and superstition, and in favour of contemporary freedom movement. Chintamani's novels were **Tankā Gachha** (The Money Tree, 1920), **Jugalmatha** (The Twin Monasteries, 1924), **Bulā Fakir** (The Roving Mendicant, 1924), **Sani Saptā** (The Curse of Sani, 1922) and **Rupāchudi** (The Silver Bangles); and Sabat's **Bhrānti** (The Mistake, 1923), **Naatundi** (In Nine Mouths, 1925), **Kāli Bohu** (The Dark Bride, 1925), **Raghu Arakhita** (Raghu Arakhita, 1928) and **Parasamoni** (The Touchstone,

1933)

At the same time there were some other novels that may be noted at this point, which showed significant variations from Phakirmohan – tradition. The novels were, **Manemane** (In One's Own Mind, 1926) by Baishnab Charan Das, **Bāsanti** (Basanti, 1924–29), **Malā Janha** (The Dead Moon, 1928) by Upendra Kishor Das, **Mātira Manisha** (The Man of Earth, 1931) by Kalindi Charan Panigrahi, **Hā Anna** (Oh, My Food, 1935) by Kanhu Charan Mohanty, **Homa Sikhā** (The Holy Flame, 1937) by Ram Prasad Singh, and **Kanā Māmu** (The One Eyed Uncle, 1937) by Laxmikanta Mahapatra. **Manemane** was probably the first psychological novel in Oriya where the emphasis was not so much on story, action or narration as on psychological complications of the protagonists, a youngman and a young woman, particularly of the young woman's mental insecurities. Similarly, **Mala Janha** also dealt with a young woman's attempts to establish her identity against adverse social situations. But in **Bāsanti**, written by diverse hands, including Baishnab Charan and Kalindi Charan and a group of women writers such as Sarala Devi, Suprava Devi, Prativa Devi etc., the woman's claims to be at par with man and to establish an identity equal to that of the other had been vindicated and realized. The three novels together provide a powerful expression of feminine-spirit and portray its vicissitudes, trials and triumphs – a new factor in the then Oriya literature.

Matira Manisha projected a new tenor, and new attitudes towards living. Thematically it dealt with social turmoils and the breakdown of the joint-family. But the motivations were not in social change but in projecting the Gandhian ideals of amity, tolerance and almost uncompromising moral honesty. The novel was a reflection of the times, and portrayed the essential moral fabric of the social-political agitations led by Gandhiji. **Ha Anna**, too, drew the attention of readers to grim social realities, but that of a different time, of the realities of the devastating famine of 1866. The famine had debased human character, but it also freed man from many of his social shakles, and what emerged finally was the vision of a new man, and of a free, new society, in a way again, the reflection of new visions of man that circulated in the thirties. These visions were seen most stridently in **Homa Sikha** which portrayed the struggles of exploited man against the capitalist exploiters

to the extent of sacrificing oneself with a view to establish classless socialistic society without inequality and exploitation. In **Kana Mamu** the motivations came back to Gandhian ideals again, and this time through the creation of an ideal character, who through his honesty, sincerity and selflessness took stand against all types of injustice and exploitation.

By a rough estimate, beginning from 1878 till 1920, in about a period of 40 years, there were about 20 or 22 novels in Oriya. But from 1920 till Independence, the number increased considerably and achieved new and newer trends and attitudes. Thus in a period of 28 years, including 1947, we had about 240 novels, about one third of which were published only in the last three years, that is, 1945–47. Besides the writers mentioned earlier, the list includes such other writers as Godabaris Misra, Ramachandra Acharya, Godabaris Mohapatra, and Harekrushna Mahatab etc. as well as such others who grew to pre-eminence after Independence, such as Gopinath Mohanty, Laxmidhar Nayak, and Nityananda Mohapatra etc. Some of these novels dealt with historical incidents, and some with crime and detection, but most, with one or other aspects of contemporary social or socio–political reality, with attitudes ranging from emotional involvement to impartial documentation and analysis. Though none of these writers, the single exception being Gopinath Mohanty, could rise above Phakirmohan's talent or even could produce something at par with his writings, yet novel, on the whole as a genre before Independence could to a large extent acquire viability, popularity and distinction all of which were much needed for this new form.

But this thing cannot be said with equal force about the related fictional form, that is, short story. Phakirmohan of course remained as the inspiration, and his stories became models for many of his contemporaries and subsequent writers. His language was inimitable. But these writers tried to imitate his sense of humour and irony as well as his habit of exploring social problems through individual characters and social scenes. Pre–eminent among these writers were Chandrasekhar Nanda (1869–1932). Godabaris Mishra, Bankanidhi Pattanaik (1889–1945) Laxmikant Mohapatra and Dibyasingh Panigrahi (1890–1948). The background of most of the stories was provided by the conflict between the old, conservative Oriya society and the new English–

educated elite in the town. Bankanidhi Pattanaik's story *Lachmanji* is an interesting example. It tells how an educated Oriya youngman disapproved the marriage arranged for him by his guardians (a normal social practice), and how in order to do a bit of fact finding he took the disguise of an unknown Bihari youth (Lachman) and travelled with his future bride and her family members by train from Gaya to Cuttack. The journey is full of excitement and humour, and the whole affair ends delightfully in a typical Oriya marriage scene when suddenly the youngman's secret was revealed. Another representative story was Godabaris Mishra's *Bhāibhāga* (The Brother's Share). It was about two brothers and their wives who quarrelled continuously among themselves. Easy victims of touts, they got involved in unending litigations. At the end when all their property was lost, and they became almost paupers, the old brotherly spirit and affection returned to them.

A significant shift took place in the thirties when short story as a genre tried to outgrow Phakirmohan's influence. The two brothers who led the way towards a change were Kalindi Charan Panigrahi and Bhagabati Panigrahi. Kalindi Charan tried to explore the self and the essential humanity embedded in man's attitudes and action – a type of psychological exploration of the human character in the context of changing social modes. Bhagabati, on the other hand, directed his attention to the lower rungs of society and started a strong socio–political current in Oriya story. Most of Kalindichraṇ's stories were published between 1935 and 1947. An interesting example was his story *Pangu* (The Lame) which was the tragic story of a lame and stunted hunchback. Similarly Bhagabati's story *Shikār* (The Hunt) narrated how a lower caste hunter became the victim of upper class privilege and bougeois law. Three more story writers who participated in this shift in attitudes, yet spoke of failings and foibilities of contemporary socio–political man, were Godabarish Mahapatra (1898–1965), Anant Pattnaik and Sachidananda Routroy, with this difference that in Routroy the characters took the social or political situation as a part of the total context, but came to have their singular moments of beauty and happiness on the one hand, and pity and horror on the other.

Apart from fiction and story, general prose, particularly essays, of discursive and descriptive nature, had a good development before

Independence, and had a group of fine writers. At one level it was idiomatic, colloqial and alert, and at another, subtle, sophisticated and scholarly. Many of the leading poets of the period wrote in prose. In addition there were many others who took to prose as their sole mode of expression. Thus Radhanath Roy wrote his fine piece of discursive prose, entitled **Bibeki**, a piece of moralistic ethical writing. Besides, Madhusudan Rao and Nandakisor Bal wrote scholarly essays on problems of literature, life and culture. Particularly, the perception and critical intelligence of Nilakantha, who also distinguished himself as a pioneer linguist and literary critic, was almost unique. His **Geetā Prabesh,** a discourse on the *Bhagbat Gita*, **Ārya Jiban (1921)** an interpretation of the Hindu view of life and society; and **Oriya Sahityar Kramaparinām**, a cultural interpretation of the evolution of Oriya literature, all written with great clarity and originality, are classics in their categories. Laxmikant Mahapatra wrote satirical prose, and Gopabandhu Das, the poet and editor of the newspapers, **Satyabādi** and **Samaj**, wrote witty and forceful prose with a view to expose and provide direction to contemporary socio–political issues.

There were also others, such as Gaurishankar Roy, the illustrious editor, who through his continuous writings in **Utkal Dipika** for about 50 years, provided unassailable viability to Oriya prose ; Biswanath Kar, critic and famous editor of **Utkal Sahitya**, who guided literary taste for three generations ; Gopal Chandra Praharaj (1872–1945), essayist and lexicographer, whose books such as **Bhāgabat Tungire Sandhyā** (Evenings in the Bhagabat Room, 1903), **Nanānka Bastāni** (My Father's File) and **Bāi Māhānti Pānji** (Mr. Bai Mahanti's Papers, 1913), dealing with various familial and social situations in a structure of wit, argument and humour, almost in the manner of Addison's '**Spectator Essays**', were written in a delicious, idiomatic, conversational style strongly reminiscent of Phakirmohan; Nilamani Bidyadyaratna (1867–1924), editor and critic whose writings provided power and grit to the movements towards the political and linguistic unification of Orissa ; Gopinath Nanda (1864–1924), critic, linguist, and lexicographer who showed amazing clarity and interpretative ability in his pioneering essays on the **Mahabharat** of Sarala Das, the great 15th century Oriya epic poet; Sashibhusan Roy (1874–1945), son of Radhanath Roy, who wrote innumerable essays

including two famous books, **Utkal Prakruti** (Nature in Orissa, 1914) and **Utkalara Rutuchitra** (Picture of Orissa's Seasons, 1918) which apart from exhibiting intimate familiarity with Orissa, vibrated with strong lyrical emotions and fine poetic perception ; Mrutunjoy Rath (1882–1925) critic, essayist and translator, who wrote in a remarkable style critical biographical essays on ancient and medieva Oriya poets, almost in the manner of Dr. Johnson's **Lives of Poets,** Jalandhar Dev (1872–1952), from the royal family of Bamanda, who wrote sharp, analytical essays on Hindu view of life as well as on the Ramayana; and Mohinimohan Senapati (1881–1945), son of Phakirmohan, who wrote highly provocative, anti-establishment essays related to religion, personal faith and social reforms. All these writers, and many more who wrote in prose, whether poets or otherwise, made prose an extremely suitable and effective mode of communication in matters of perception as well as intelligence. They not only substantially contributed to the essential structure of pre-Independence Oriya literature, but also created an aura and atmosphere of taste and understanding in consonant with the rapidly changing dimensions in human knowledge and experience in the fast half of the 20th century.

Of all forms pursued in the pre–Independence Oriya literature, drama was probably weakest, and that too, in spite of the forceful lead given by Ramsankar. Of course, there was the other stream, the folk–opera, popularly called 'Jatra' (Yatra), chief exponents of which were Baishnab Pani (1882–1956), Balakrushna Mohanty (1900–1958) Gopal Das (1877–1939), and which was providing main entertainment to the rural folk, and particularly in Baishnab Pani, it was acquiring reformistic attitudes and social motivations. But the first Oriya play modelled on the Western tradition was staged in 1877, a little before Ramsankar, entitled **Bābāji** (The Mendicant). It was written by Jagamohan Lala (1838–1913) and dealt with a number of social ills, including drinking, adultery and superstitions in a satirical vein. But for about 40 years, beginning from 1880 till about 1920, barring Ramsankar and his dramatic achievement, Oriya drama in general was not in a good shape, and the few dramas that were staged during this period by such writers as Jagamohan Lala (**Sati**, 1886), Kamapal Misra (1875–1927; **Sitā Bibāha**, 1899), Bhikari Charan Pattanaik (1878-1962 ; **Katak Bijaya**, The

Conquest of Cuttack, 1901; **Nandikeswari**, 1915 etc.), and Godabaris Misra (**Purusottam Dev**, 1917), had marginal influence on the growth of Oriya drama. Ramsankar had written about 30 plays, and had tried to make drama a viable form of entertainment as well as of serious discussion. In real terms his lead was taken up by Ashwini Kumar Ghose (1892–1962) whose dramas were written and staged mostly between 1915 and 1940, during which period he was reckoned as the only important dramatist. Ashwini Kumar wrote on social problems suggesting solutions, and advocated national integration and an aggressive patriotism. Some of his relatively more important plays were **Hindu Ramani** (Hindu Women), **Bhāi** (Brother), **Chasājhia** (The Farmer's Girl) etc. as well as **Srimandir**, **Kalāpāhad**, **Konarka** etc. But on the whole, drama remained as a weak form throughout the period, and could not express as significantly as poetry and prose could, the finer spirit of the time, at least not until Kalicharan Pattanaik, (1898– 1978) who wrote, directed and staged his socially motivated plays. He was like a link between the pre and post-Independence Oriya drama. He continued the earlier themes, but both structurally and linguistically, they developed a responsible and responsive form which catered satisfactorily to the new taste of the time, and established Pattanaik as the first important dramatist of the modern times. Some of his extremely popular and well-known plays were, **Bhāta** (Rice), **Chumban** (Kiss), **Girl School** and **Abhijān** (The Conquest). Thus the new age which had begun with Radhanath, Phakirmohan, Madhusudan and Ramsankar in the later part of the nineteenth century, came to a turning point with the dawn of Independence.

(v)

Between Independence and till today, a period of more than 50 years, Oriya literature went through a lot of changes, with new and newer dimensions being added almost continuously. Whereas modern Oriya literature before Independence more or less followed well–defined and familiar lines such as sensitiveness to nature and involvement in such emotions as love and mysticism, or acquiescence to nationalistic and patriotic feelings, or strong social awareness and compassionate camaraderie with the downtrodden and the poor, or even in the

expression of implicit horror at the shift of culture from rural to urban surroundings, post–Independence literature exhibited a wide variety of emotions, sensibilities, attitudes and approaches, as well as multifaceted themes related to the social, political, and cultural atmosphere on the one hand, and psychological problems of sentience and existence on the other. Whatever was local or national now merged with whatever else was international or cosmopolitan, and writings of modern writers became local manifestations of cosmopolitan attitudes. There was a greater confidence and involvement in the act of creation as well as in the attempts to shape the creative spirit to respond to the challenges of the time. There was also a greater awareness of changes, along with a resilience to adapt to these, as also the necessary perception of man's predicament in the world that moved from industry to technology to nuclear holocaust. Thus the changes had been both in numerical terms as well as in terms of mind and attitude. All these, as reflected in the post–Independence literature, gave to it, in general, a remarkable substance.

Gopinath Mohanty (1914–1991) has been the greatest writer of the period. But interestingly, it is not the novel that Gopinath exploited so successfully, registered the richest growth during this period. But other genres such as poetry, short story, drama, and to a large extent autobiography, did so. First of all, they broke with the past, that is, they came to be different from the type of poetry, short story and drama in vogue and popular before Independence, or even at the time of Independence. Secondly, and more importantly, it was in the quality and nature of reaction to the problems of contemporary life, and responsiveness to changes in taste and sensibility, that their significance lay. Important writers in these genres are, apart from Gopinath Mohanty, Godabaris Mahapatra, Sachidananda Rautray, Guruprasad Mohanty (b. 1924), Ramakant Rath (b. 1934) and Sitakant Mahapatra (b. 1937) in poetry; Surendra Mohanty (1922–1990) in novel and short story; Kishori Charan Das (b. 1924) and Manoj Das (b. 1934) in short story; and Manoranjan Das (b. 1920) in drama.

Gopinath Mohanty was a versatile writer. Beginning from early thirties he wrote continuously for about 60 years, till his death in 1991. In addition to fiction he wrote short stories, poems, plays, biographies,

a memoir and innumerable critical essays. Beside, he did a number of translations into Oriya, and translated his own novel **Paraja** into English. But Gopinath's greatest creative achievement was in novel and short story and he probed into three areas to write these– rural, tribal and urban. Like Radhanath's and Phakirmohan's before him, his writings showed an acute awareness of the shift in civilization and the growing cultural clashes, how or to what extent man's integrity and identity have to be preserved on the face of emerging evil in man's dispensation. Like Phakirmohan he was deeply involved with social realities and used language creatively, almost as a purifying medium to cleanse the experiences of the tribe. Like others at their time, he set trends, promoted taste and in a general way provided the necessary nourishment for the growth of post–Independence Oriya literature.

His three most important novels were **Parajā** (The Paraja's, 1945), **Amrutar Santān** (The Immortal Sons, 1947) and **Mātimatāla** (The Fertile Soil, 1964). The first two deal with the tribal groups of southern Orissa and the last an epic of Oriya village life. In **Paraja** the details of tribal life emerge through the accounts of the family of Sukrujani, in a Paraja village set in the midst of mountains and forests, and the family's tale of woe is dramatically realised against the background of a luxuriant nature, coupled with a sense of joy and hope, typical of the tribe. It is a clash between innocence and evil where the former is defeated. **Amrutar Santan** has wider perspective. The emphasis is still on one family and the locale one village. But the simpler features of **Paraja** are replaced by a complex organization and shifting relationships which give a deeper and more intense experience of life. Evil is still operative, but innocence refuses to be cowed down, and emerges as a hard, bright jewel at the end. **Mātimatāla,** the longest novel in Oriya, is a novel of great magnitude and power and interestingly, for its length, the novel has the barest outline of a story, based on the subtle complexities of the relationship between the hero and the heroin, presented with remarkable reticence. In fact the real protagonist is the village, the village in change, both physically and mentally as well as in attitudes and motivations, and to what extent these changes can be faced. In the process the whole structure of Oriya rural life, its uniqueness, strength and weaknesses are laid bare as has happened in no other novel before or

since.

Godabaris Mahapatra had his roots in the pre-Independence days and shared many of the concerns of pre-Independence writers. But his long editorship of **Niākhunta** (The Stick of Fire), a socio-political weekly of courageous dissent which he founded in 1938 and edited till his death (1966) brought out another aspect of his creative talent, an aspect wedded to wit, satire and irony, which he applied with devastating effect in his analysis of contemporary socio-political-cultural items. Almost all his poems and prose pieces were first published in this journal and together they established him as the foremost satirical poet of contemporary Orissa. His two most important poetical volumes were, **Kantā O Phula** (The Thorn and the Flower, 1958) and **Bankā O Sidhā** (The Straight and the Crooked, 1964).

If Mahapatra's roots were in the pre-Independence era, so too was the case with Sachidananda Routray. His early poems, written in the thirties and forties, were a part of the poetic traditions in vogue at that time. But his poems written after Independence showed a new strain, an approach and understanding related to an uncertainty and restlessness of spirit. Such of his poems collected in **Swagāt** (Soliloquy, 1958), show his serious concern for form and content, and established him as a pioneer poet in the new mode, a credit not given to Mahapatra.

Routraya's subsequent volumes such as **Kabita 1962**, **Kabita 1971** and **Kabita 1974** etc. continued to exhibit his capacity to respond to new taste and understanding. Routray's movement towards metaphysical compactness in language and imagination, in spite of continuing elements of romanticism and left-oriented progressivism in his earlier poetry, provided to that extent, a pioneering voice in the rise of new Oriya poetry after Independence. But the major responsibility towards the formulation and establishment of new taste, attitude and idiom in poetry came to be shared by Guruprasad Mohanty, Ramakant Rath and Sitakant Mahapatra. Guruprasad began writing from early fifties, Ramakant from late fifties and Sitakant from early sixties, and by seventies they had got established as major forces in post-Independence Oriya poetry. All three drew their strength from the intensity of their involvement with the middle and later twentieth century urban and technological civilization, and the patterns of existence this brought to bear on contemporary

living. Deeply personal in tone on the one hand, and conversationally–ironic in texture on the other, their poetry evolved an anonymity of understanding, and grappled with an alienated vision of existence. They freely took recourse to the use of such devices as wit, irony, paradox and ambiguity in their poetic exposition. In addition, they incorporated ancient myths, specially related to Krishna, as part of their poetic structure to illustrate attitudes and motivations. This brought commonality and universality in their poetry not seen in Oriya poetry before. At the same time all showed complete control over idiomatic conversational language, explored its suppleness and flexibility, and on the whole used Oriya language to convey perception and understanding integral to present day living.

Guruprasad, the least articulate of the three, wrote very sparingly. His first collection of poetry, entitled **Samudrasnāna** (Sea Bathing) was published in 1970, and his second, entitled **Āscharya Avisār** (Strange Tryst), was published in 1988. Together they contained about 70 poems, including *Kalapurusa* (The Hunter, 375 lines), his most famous and longest poem which was first published in 1960, in the quarterly journal **Prajna**, a journal of the new mode. Though limited in output Guruprasad's poems had tremendous influence over the younger generations, and his poems shocked and provoked the reading public as few poems had done before. Structurally his poems were intimate soliloquies of a soul in agony – unfixed, unstable and alienated from an uncomprehending world, victim of time and futility of existence. *Kalapurusa* is a good illustration of his power. It is conceived like corridors which branch out from one central point, but instead of moving away, they move into each other, to finally return to the same central point from where they had started, a journey dominated by suffering and desire. Guruprasad's poems are deeply rooted in the post–Independence Oriya urban culture and are remarkable evidence of the supple powers of Oriya idiomatic language.

Ramakant's first poetical collection entitled **Ketedinara** (Far Off Days) was published in 1962. Subsequently he had **Anek Kothari** (Many Rooms, 1967), **Sandigdha Mrugayā** (The Doubtful Hunt, 1971), **Saptama Rutu** (The Seventh Season, 1977), **Sachitra Andhāra** (Pictorial Darkness, 1982) and **Sri Radhā** (Sri Radha, 1985) etc. **Sri Radhā** was a sequence

of 61 poems on one theme – human soul's agonizing responses towards a dialectic of fulfilment and futility, seen in the context of Sri Radha's complex psychological responses to Sri Krishna. Ramakant's early poetry dealt with romantic emotions and rhetorical statements in a reflective–meditative mood. But he quickly grew out of it and moved towards a complex apprehension of the duality of existence and also towards freer poetic movement. A good example is *Saguna* (Vulture) from **Saptama Rutu** which can be compared in a way to Yeats's 'Sailing to Byzantium', as in both the poems at one level the poets speak of a country with those "dying generations". But whereas in Yeats's poem the protagonist could set sail from "that country" to "Byzantium", in *Saguna* the escape is not easy because the protagonist cannot avoid the temptations and sticks to them, though he knows they only lead him to death – "Suddenly the crowd of foxes and dogs/And loneliness in fields, schools and shops / And the strange moaning voices from horizon to horizon". Ramakant provided a deep troubled voice to modern Oriya poetry, troubled because of its intense awareness of futility.

Sitakant Mahapatra's first poetry book entitled **Dipti O Dyuti** (The Shine and the Glow) was published in 1963. Subsequently, he had 11 more volumes including such volumes as **Astapadi** (Eight Steps, 1967), **Sabdar Ākash** (The Sky of Words, 1971), **Samudra** (The Sea, 1977), **Samayar Seshanāma** (The Last Name of Time, 1984) and **Barsā Sakāla** (Rainy Morning, 1993), etc. Sitakant's continuous poetic preoccupation has been with human existence, particularly as it goes through agony, sorrow and despair towards joy and bliss. Related to this he conceives time as a unit, which goes through a movement and yet has no movement, and where all time becomes one time – hence the references to myth and the revaluation of tradition. The awareness is both poetic and philosophical; it adds reality to creative word and when compounded with such references as to family, parents, village, rural life, city and urban living etc., it provides remarkable strength to Sitakant's poetry.

Surendra Mohanty, politician and journalist, whose literary career began from the forties, wrote novels, stories, biographies, travelogues, criticism, plays as well as innumerable journalistic essays making a mark in each form. His historical novel **Nila Saila** (The Blue Mountain, 1969) that depicted the travails of an eighteenth century Oriya king

who was converted into Islam, and his intricate relationship with Lord Jagannath of Puri, whom he tried to save from the Muslim invaders; as also his two–volume fictional biography of Madhusudan Das, the maker of modern Orissa (**Satabdhira Surya**, The Sun of the Century, 1970; and **Kulabrudha**, The Elder, 1977), were extremely popular. Mohanty also wrote a successful political novel **Andha Diganta** (Blind Horizon, 1964), mapping the political changes in India from 1921 to 1952, a descent from high hopes and dreams to political disillusionment, defeat and loss. But the genre in which Mohanty excelled was short story, where he came to be reckoned among the very best in Oriya literature, almost at par with Gopinath Mohanty and which combined a keen sympathy for the social predicament with a perceptive insight into the ways of contemporary living. Some of his important collections were, **Krushnachudā** (Gul Mohur, 1951), **Sesha Kabitā** (The Last Poem, 1955), **Sabuja Patra O Dhusar Golāp** (Green Leaf and Gray Rose, 1958), **Maralara Mrutyu** (Death of the Swan, 1962) and **Mahā Nirvāna** (The Final End, 1965) etc. Mohanty's keen observation of the psychology of people, and strong socio-political consciousness, particularly in stories, often merged with a sharp, satirical attitude and provided a powerful dimension to Oriya creative writing.

Kishori Charan Das, who served as a member of the Indian Audit and Accounts Service, and stayed mostly outside Orissa with long spells abroad, started writing from early fifties and mostly in one form, that is story. His first story collection entitled **Bhangā Khelanā** (The Broken Toy) was published in 1961. Subsequently he had more collections, such as **Lakhya Bihanga** (A Million Birds, 1968) **Ghar Bāhudā** (Home Coming, 1968), **Thākura Ghara** (The Prayer Room, 1975), **Sita Lahari** (Cold Waves, 1986) etc. Of late Das has switched over to novel. What distinguishes his stories and novels, first of all, is a quality of contemplation of modern man's predicament in an increasingly hostile urban culture, and secondly, in the writer's penchant for wit and irony, particularly irony, which he conveys at times with devastating effect. Some good examples are such stories as *Lakhya Bihanga* or *Nāli Gulu Gulu Sādhab Bohu* (The Little Red Bride), or even *Bhangā Muna* (The Broken Point) and *Troyabinsa Mrutu* (The Twenty Third Death). Whereas the first one is about the boredom of a town-bred rich woman, and the

second is about the encounter of a foreign returned girl with the crude, limited native culture, and the third is about the desperate attempts of a man to deny his own loss of creativity, the last one is a retelling of the great Mahabharat queen Gandhari's 23rd marriage to a Sahada tree which also died like all earlier 22 suitors, which establishes an archetype where Gandhari assumes elemental powers, and her link through marriage with other people becomes like a movement of death through ages. Kishori Charan is a major story writer in Oriya today, and his writings provide strong moral reaction to the present-day world.

Manoj Das's first story–collection entitled **Samudrara Khyudā** (The Sea's Hunger) was published in 1950, and subsequently, he has a number of other collections, such as **Bisakanyāra Kāhāni** (The Story of a Bride of Poison, 1954), **Āranyaka** (Forest Like, 1960), **Ābu Purusa O Annyānya Kahani** (Abu Purusa and Other Stories, 1975), **Manoj Panchabinasti** (25 Tales of Manoj, 1983) etc. Most of his stories written till 1970 were collected in an omnibus volume entitled **Manoj Dāsanka Kathā O Kāhāni** (1971). An ever growing urban consciousness provides the main motive force in the stories of Manoj, and his protagonist, normally a town–bred elite, is often seen caught in the coils of modern living. The essential feelings of loneliness and helplessness on the one hand, and a desire for hiding these behind a veneer of gaity, entertainment and wit characterize many of his stories. Though they have often parable like structures, he probes deep into the subconscious of the characters and tries to figure them out through the complexities of irony and ambivalence. Manoj writes prolifically, and apart from stories he has also a number of novels – sharp probings into the degeneration and uncertainty of contemporary life.

Manoranjan Das, the premier dramatist after Kalicharan Pattanaik, was the chief exponent of new drama in Orissa after Independence. He has so far written 18 plays, in addition to a large number of One-Acts, and all along his strongest forte has been his capacity to react to the changing situations. Beginning with politically charged early plays encompassing hope, ambition and disillusionment, through exploration of the labyrinth of human psyche on the one hand, and serious existential contemplation of human predicament in modern times on the other, Das has come to his latest plays like **Bitarkita Aparānha** (Controversial

Afternoon, 1981) and **Nandikā Kesari** (1985) where the emphasis is on a desire for tranquility and bliss for the tortured human soul. Manoranjan's creative faith, it may be said, lies in his substantial insight into the nature of contemporary existence, and his plays organise themselves like a metaphor of human complications in the context of a disintegrating and disintegrated world. His latest is a remarkable massive autobiography – a unique exposition and documentation of last 60 years of Orissa's socio–cultural life, including developments in drama. It is entitled **Smruti Samlāp** (Dialogues in Memory) and compares favourably with Gopinath Mohanty's remarkable autobiography (**Srotaswoti**).

(vi)

The post-Independence Oriya literature till about the nineties, saw a number of writers in different genres who, while being concerned with the changing patterns of life after Independence, also generally wrote in the context of an ever-increasing urban consciousness in a rapidly expanding urban environment. The feelings changed from unidimensional concentration to multidimensional attitudes towards life and life's problems, and towards an expanding sophistication of an urban civilization related to the increasing techno-nuclear realities of the time. Apart from the writers we have mentioned earlier, the following is a brief and select account of the writers who achieved eminence in their concerned genres and helped to give a substantial shape to the varieties of the post–Independence Oriya literature. As usual the most sensitive expression was in poetry, followed by short story, novel and drama etc.

Poetry

The first who comes to mind is Bhanuji Rao (1926–2001), the grandson of Madhusudan Rao, who was a companion of Guruprasad in launching the new poetry movement in Oriya. His first poetry book **Bisad Eka Rutu** (Despair A Season, 1973) contained 85 poems, most of which were published in the fifties and sixties. The poems were remarkable for their restrained tone, compact imagery and careful attention to form. Subsequently, he had more poetry collections such as, **Nai Aarapāri** (The Otherside of the River, 1986), **Chandan Banare**

Ekā (Alone in a Sandalwood Forest, 1994), **Darpana Agare** (In Front of the Mirror, 1995), **Ekā Ebam Ekā Ekā** (Alone and All Alone, 1996), and **Naisabdara Muhān** (The Face of Silence, 2001) etc. Bhanuji did not write long poems. But his short poems provided multiple variations of the central theme of instability and loss of fixity – an inner perception of overpowering disunity in life, and the consequent sense of loneliness. Bhanuji's poetry had a remarkable intensity of feeling, and along with Guruprasad he was responsible in creating a positive taste for new poetry in the sixties.

The other considerable poet is Saubhagya Kumar Misra (b. 1941) whose first book **Atmanepadi** (Interior Talks) was published in 1965, followed by **Madhyapadalopi** (Missing the Middle Word, 1971), **Naipahanrā** (Swimming a River, 1973), **Andha Mahumāchhi** (Blind Bees, 1977), **Dwā Supurna** (Two Birds, 1984) **Manikarnikā**, 1990) etc. Mishra's understanding of modern life is sharply analytical and perceptive. A fine example is the title poem of the volume **Andha Mahumachhi**. At one level the blindness of the bee is symbolic. It relates to the denial of vision to the protagonist who blindly gropes through existence in a state of helpless melancholy. But the bee's activity is also symbolic, because though blind yet it flies in search of honey, and interestingly, honey may be found anywhere, and even though vision is denied at one point, it may be granted at another, and while submitting to time's power one may grow independent of it. Saubhagya's understanding and insight have continued in all his volumes, and in today's Oriya poetry he represents an intense and deeply illuminating awareness.

Jagannath Prasad Das (b. 1937), another important poet, had his first volume published in 1971, entitled **Pratham Purusa** (First Person). It contained 25 poems in a unique get–up, and immediately projected Das as a fine poet of the new mode. Subsequent volumes have been **Annyasabu Mrutu** (All Other Deaths), **Je Jahār Nirjanatā** (Everyman to His Loneliness) and **Annya Desa Bhinna Samaya** (Another Country, Another Time) etc. all together about ten volumes. Jagannath, like his immediate predecessors in poetry, was intensely aware of loneliness, instability and death on the one hand, and a nourishing, meditative insight on the other. Generally, many of his poems have a context in love, but

his poetic directions usually move towards a compact emotional sophistication delicately concerned with time and time's waste.

In fact by the end of the seventies, the new Oriya poetry, that is, the tradition of Oriya poetry begun after Independence, from the fifties onwards, by Guruprasad, Ramakanta, Sitakanta and Bhanuji, had a fine flowering which has continued unabated ever since. Many more poets since the seventies have their contributions to its growing dimension, and today it is the major poetic tradition that provides the most important creative reaction to the complexities of modern life. We have already made references to Saubhagya and Jagannath. The other equally significant poets of this tradition are, Saurindra Barik (b. 1938), Rajendra Kishor Panda (b.1944), Sarat Chandra Pradhan (b.1934) Deepak Mishra (b.1939), Prativa Satpathy (b.1945), Phani Mohanty (b.1944), Bansidhar Sarangi (b. 1940), Harihar Misra (b. 1941) and Haraprasad Das (b. 1945).

Sri Barik has eight poetry collections so far, the latest being **Chahalā Chhāire Ghadie** (An Hour Under the Shifting Shadow, 1995). His poetry, in general, has two important directions, one, an exposition of his own reactions, not so much to things, but to attitudes ; and secondly, to objectify the same reactions through such mediums, particularly the Mahabharat, and through such symbols as are present in daily life, such as his much used bicycle. Thus the traditional Mahabharat associations go through areas of subtle moods and feelings wherein characters like Duryodhana and Yudhisthir, realize the emptiness at the end and ruminate on simple joys, and final futility of all action. Barik's poems have strong modern nuances, particularly vis-a-vis modern life, and his language which appears deceptively simple, has both the elasticity and the strength of a mind in complete control of his experiences.

Rajendra Kishor Panda has ten poetry collections so far, the first being **Gaun Debatā** (The Minor God, 1975), and the latest being **Bahubreehi** (The Magpipe, 1991), and including two of his most well-known volumes, **Sailakalpa** (Like Rock, 1982) and **Annyā** (The Unique Lady, 1988). From the beginning Rajendra's poetry specially distinguished itself by its use of language, by its cultivation of spoken rhythm to convey even most personal and sophisticated feelings and thought, and by its free use of hitherto untapped powers of ancient

Oriya words. Thematically his poems concerned themselves with details of life on the one hand – hence as in his book **Sailakalpa** the metaphor of 'whirlpool', and on the other, with a movement away from that towards grace and illumination – the metaphor relating to the paradoxical situation of the 'west appearing as the east'.

Sri Pradhan has written sparingly. Beginning from 1973 when his first poetry collection was published, he has five collections so far, the two latest being **Jajāti** (Jajati, 1991) and **Avaya Vaya** (Feerless Fear, 1994). Like Sri Panda, Sarat took to writing in a completely new style, a mix of nursery rhyme simplicity and the condensed unfamiliarity of religious hymn. But thematically like others, he too dealt with the perception of instability and insecurity and tried to formulate a meaningful understanding from the immense futility around. **Jajati**, for example, recounts the perception in mythical terms and shows how both the youth and the old age have equally become futile.

Deepak Mishra has been very prolific. Beginning from 1961, when his first collection **Asamāpikā** (Unfinished) was published, he has as yet about 16 collections, including such books as **Nirjana Nakhyatra** (Lonely Star, 1971), **Sunnyatāra Sosha** (The Thirst of Emptiness, 1982) and **Dhulira Simhāsana** (The Throne of Dust, 1989) etc. Deepak's poems are documents of livingness, of experiencing life deeply and densely. His poetic voice has perception of death, suffering and emptiness – suffering that grows out of incompleteness and loneliness. But it also deals with a consciousness tinged with mystery as also with feelings for beauty and grace as inherent forces of life.

Smt. Prativa Satpathy has 8 poetry collections so far. Beginning from **Asthajahanara Eligi** (The Elegy of the Setting Moon, 1969) her other well–known collections are **Sāhādā Sundari** (The Charming Sahada, 1978), **Nimise Akhyara** (Word in a Minute, 1985) and **Sabari** (The Forest Woman, 1991) etc. Her poetry provides fine examples of how best the continuing tension between time and existence can be resolved. The coils of life lead to a desire of escape for which the protagonist keeps on waiting. But when the hopes of a release materialise one is not sure if that to be accepted. In fact, Prativa's poetry throbs with an underlying current of uncertainty and insecurity, and with the twin desires of escape and involvement. Her presentation of 'Sabari', the forest-woman who

waited for Sri Ramachandra, is a fine reflection of the modern man's predicament.

Phani Mohanty has seven collections so far. **Mānchitra** (A Map), the first collection, was published in 1973. Subsequently the poet has more collections, such as **Bidagdha Hrudaya** (The Burnt-out Heart, 1981), **Priyatamā** (Dearest, 1988) **Māyā Darpana** (The Magic Mirror, 1990) and **Bisād Yoga** (The Melancholy Yoga, 1992) etc. Phani's vision is often inward, and it often shows sharp awareness of life's uncertainties, for example, as in **Maya Darpana**, an unusual and innovative book in the total oeuvre of modern Oriya poetry, it is a combination of illusions, and existence is a continuous attempt to escape from that. Like Sm. Satapathy's before, Phani's poetic self is plagued by insecurity and uncertainty wherein such conditions as life, death, and what may happen after death, remain vague and hazy, and as one remains in the pitiable existence between attachment and non–attachment, one realizes how incompetent he is to be released from the coils of life. Phani provides a sharply troubled and hesitant voice to modern Oriya poetry.

Both Bansidhar and Harihar took to poetry more or less at the same time, that is, in the late seventies. But whereas Bansidhar has only five collections so far, Harihar has thirteen. Some of the well-known books of both are, **Sabari Charyā** (The Hospitality of Sabari, 1989) and **Chhāyādarsan** (Seeing the Shadow, 1995) by Bansidhar, and **Akhyama Debatā** (Incapable God, 1978), **Chāhāni Mandap** (The Looking Pandal, 1987), **Sabda Ekā Ekā Ekatra** (Words Alone and Together, 1995) and **Darpana Silā** (The Stone Mirror, 1995) etc. by Harihar. **Sabari Charya**, probably Bansidhar's most important volume, takes us back to the atmosphere of ancient mystical poetry, the Charya poems of 10th–13th centuries, which is invoked in modern terms to provide some relief, if at all, to the contemporary diffidence and despair. In fact Bansidhar's poetry deals with existence and the uncertainty inherent in the complications of existence, and like his Sabari's desires, the poet's realisations move from the dark areas of loneliness to the illumination of truth. Like Bansidhar's Harihar's poetry too tries to formulate modern predicament and to what extent it can give a shape to the present sense of emptiness. It is also in him a search for truth, to understand the tension that lies between reality and imagination on the one hand, and

growth and decay on the other, and to hold up oneself like *darpansilā*, the stone mirror of Lord Jagannath, so that it can reflect the Lord, if at all. Both Bansidhar and Harihar are deeply sensitive to modern futility, and both try to provide a hope and assurance to the same.

Haraprasad Das's first volume of poetry entitled **Ālokita Banabās** (The Illuminated Banishment) was published in 1978, but the second and subsequent volumes entitled **Mantrapāth** (Reciting Hymns), **Garvagruha** (Inner Sanctum) and **Duratwar Bhrama** (The Illusion of Distance) etc. came out after 1991, 13 years after the first volume. Haraprasad's poetry showed some immediate difference from the prevailing modern Oriya poetry. First, it did not take up myth or mythical reference as an essential part of the poetic structure. Secondly, it used part-sentences to make necessary effect. Thirdly, it developed a philosophy of its own–philosophy given to joy, hope and grace. Haraprasad's poetry was contemplative and meditative at one level, and at the other, it was sharp and subtle and developed a perception of total integrity in life.

What we have mapped so far is the main tradition of post Independence Oriya poetry. In addition to the poets we have discussed above, there are many more, who belong to this tradition and have helped to strengthen it in their own ways. An awareness of reality, and a desire to relate that to a deeper awareness of existence, along with a desire to put all that in a meaningful structure have what characterized the poetry of these poets. It is a long way from the rhyming mellifluous structure of the pre-Independence days to a spoken, conversational language of everyday speech, and from a unidimensional concentration with familiar, domestic desires to a mocking, ironical multidimensional attitude towards life. Modern Oriya poetry has not only taken a new turn, but has also acquired a new maturity.

Simultaneously, the other major poetic traditions, such as traditions of romantic and progressive poetry, that used to be influential and dominant in the years before Independence, have also their exponents in the post-Independence period. Some such poets are, Binod Naik (b. 1919), Kunjabihari Das (1914–1994) and Benudhar Rout (b. 1926) who manifested a quiet but intense romantic emotion having affinity with pastoral and rural life; Nirmala Devi (1907–87) whose poems of love

and joy had a fine mystic perception; and Rabi Singh (b. 1932) and Prasanna Kumar Patsani (b. 1947), both of whom showed deep socio–political involvement and had excellent command over form. Particularly, Binod Naik is having ten poetry collections, Rabi Singh more than twenty, and Prasanna Patasani has ten poetry collections. All these are capable poets and together richly contribute to the total mosaic of post–Independence. Oriya poetry.

Short Story

Next to poetry, it is in short story that post-Independence Oriya literature has achieved immense distinction and competence. In comparison to poets, the story writers have been many more and have got easier acceptance in contemporary journals, and also in comparison to poetry, greater popularity. The story writers too, like the poets, write in terms of the rising urban consciousness and consequent feelings of alienation, though on the whole, they are generally much more involved with the changes in social structure by way of exposition and analysis. These include senior and elderly writers who wrote immediately after Independence and those others who came to prominence in the sixties and seventies. Thus apart from the major story writers such as Gopinath Mohanty or Surendra Mohanty etc. discussed earlier, others include, to name relatively more important ones, first of all, such elderly writers as Nityananda Mahapatra (b. 1912), Rajkishor Roy (1914–1998), Basant Kumar Satpathy (1914–1994), Bama Charan Mitra (1915–1976), Faturananda (1915–1995), and Rajkishor Pattanaik (1917–1980)

Nityananda Mahapatra, son of Laxmikant Mahapatra, a novelist, besides being a story teller, showed a fine capacity to analyze the human psyche in a structure of humour and irony. His writings include such volumes of stories, as **Egāratā** (At Eleven), **Khyanika** (For a Moment), **Dhalāgara Kalāgar** (White Line and Black Line) and **Ākhi Nāi Kānanāi** (No Eyes No Ears) etc., all probings of human psychology and analysis of social, even socio-political context with sharp humour. Rajkishor Roy, too, wrote of social issues and social situations in connection with human behaviour but with compassion and sympathy, and often with great deal of emotion. His books include **Nila Lahari** (Blue Waves), **Bikacha Satadala** (Blossoming Lotus) and **Panka Chandana** (The Clay

and Sandalwood Paste) etc. Basant Kumar Satpathy wrote with sharp wit and humour, largely in the context of Balasore, and often showed the tension between the individual and the social predicament. His books include **Gangā O Gāngi** (Ganga and Gangi), **Gotā Ālu** (A Piece of Patato) and **Enti Romantic** (Anti Romantic) etc. Bama Charan Mitra wrote on socio-personal themes, both with pleasant humour and subtle ironical attitudes, often with references to pattern of life in the Cuttack city. His stories have been collected in three volumes such as **Mitralāva**, **Mitrakalpa** etc. Faturananda (Ramachandra Mishra) wrote with humour and wit, invariably about social frailties and individual's incompleteness. His books of stories include **Heresā** (Laughing Stock), **Sahitya Chāsa** (Cultivation of Literature), **Bidusaka** (The Joker) etc. Rajkishor Pattanaik wrote remarkably on simple emotions and situations related to man's contact with domestic animals on the one hand, and with conflicting social situations on the other. His books include, **Tutha Pathar** (The Trodden Stone), **Sālagram** (The Divine Stone), **Nisāna Khunta** (The Mile Stone) and **Hrudayara Bandhan** (Heart's Ties) etc.

Secondly, there were other writers who came to prominence in the sixties and who wrote as powerfully as the earlier writers, and also with a similar social awareness and strong tendency towards social analysis, with wit, humour and irony. We may particularly mention two writers– Mahapatra Nilamani Sahu (b. 1926) and Akhilmohan Pattanaik (1927–1982)

Thematically, Mahapatra Nilamani Sahu's stories are all generally concerned with middle class life and its manifold problems, as well as with the sense of alienation and the boredom of the urban middle class intellectual. His early stories had a flair for comic and humorous elements that continued as important structural components even in his later writings. But his later stories gradually grew to become serious analyses of contemporary existence, rising to almost a prophetic–philosophic understanding at times. A representative story written in the sixties *Ranuapā Thāru Pusijāye* (From Sister Ranu to the Kitten), was the study of three sisters, all whose attempts to establish themselves through love and affection ended in an overpowering sense of loneliness and disarray. Differently, a story written in the eighties, such as *Avisapta Gandharba* has different dimensions of experience, about how an

agonizing incident of the past is metamorphosed into strange feelings of a deep contentment and happiness, where that which appears to be cursed becomes a new, vitalizing source of life. Sahu has about 18 story collections and some of his well-known books are, **Michha Bāgha** (The False Tiger, 1955), **Kapota Pakhi Guru Mora** (My Teacher the Dove, 1963), **Andha Rātir Surya** (The Sun of Dark Night, 1971), **Annya Rupa Rupāntara** (Metamorphosis, 1974), **Abhisapta Gandharva** (The Cursed Gandharva, 1984), etc. In contrast to Nilamani, Akhilmohan had only four story collections, such as **Jhadar Eagal O Dharanira Krushnsār** (The Eagle of the Storm and the Stag of the Earth, 1964) and **O Andhagali** (And Blind Lane, 1979) and posthumous **Nadira Nāma Ganatantra** (Democracy, the River's Name, 1984) and **Pratham O Sesha** (The First and the Last, 1990), all of which provided a sharp analysis of contemporary middle class life. Pattanaik's stories had, first of all, a bohemian 'careless' attitude towards life, secondly, a strong left–commitment reflecting his personal association with the left movements, and thirdly, a strong element of humanism that showed his compassion for human predicament. But all through his stories, as an integral structural element, what was dominant was an intense sense of loneliness, as if, all that needed to be fulfilled could not be so, and so called involvement with life often ends with a feeling of futility. Both Nilamani and Akhil, not only dominated the sixties, but their influence extended to the seventies and provided newer directions to Oriya short story.

The seventies, too, saw the emergence of new groups of writers who not only took to short story as the most convenient medium of creative expression, but at the same time, continued their involvement with the social predicament of the urban middle class, and provided sharp and witty analysis of the same. Such writers were Durgamadhab Mishra (1928–2000), Chandrasekhar Rath (b. 1929), Satkadi Hota (b. 1930), Krushna Prasad Mishra (1933–94), Santanu Kumar Acharya (b. 1933), Chaudhury Hemakanta Misra (b. 1934), Sm. Binapani Mohanty (b. 1936) and Rabi Pattanaik (1938–1991). Some of these like Hota and Acharya also distinguished themselves as novelists. But all of them, together and severally, provided strong socio–psychological attitudes and socio-personal involvements with the factors of contemporary life,

and at the same time brought in individual distinctions as structural elements in their stories. Thus Chaudhury Hemakant often used humour as a strong component in his tales; Krushna Prasad incorporated a delightful cosmopolitanism with urgent social problems; Chandrasekhar communicated spiritual visions along with socio-psychological motivations; Acharya probed competently into human consciousness; Hota used subtle yet powerful irony to carry his effects; Durgamadhab used a wide social range including his own profession; Pattanaik injected strong elements of humanism and liberal attitude towards life; and Bina dealt with feminism and brought a distinct female identity to her stories. These writers had large number of story-collections each, some of which are, **Tarā O Timir** (The Stars and Darkness) and **Falgura Bannyā** (The Flood in Falgu) by Durgamadhab Misra, **Samrāt O Annyanya Galpa** (The Emperor and Other Stories) and **Aswārohir Galpa** (The Stories of a Cavalier) by Chandrasekhar Rath, **Mo Galpar Nāyak** (The Hero of my Stories) and **Nilāchalaku Rāstā** (Road to Nilachala) by Satakadi Hota, **Nāigra O Debajāni** (Naigra and Debajani) and **Bhrugu Samhitā** by Krushna Prasad Misra, **Adina Baula** (Untimely Blossoms) and **Mana Marmar** (The Mind's Palpitations) by Santanu Kumar Acharya, **Patadei** (The Sister Pata) and **Kasturi Mruga O Sabuja Arannya** (The Musk Dear and the Green Forest) by Binapani Mohanty, and **Bandhyā Gāndhāri** (The Barren Gandhari) and **Bichitra Baranā** (Many Coloured Woman) by Rabi Pattanaik.

In fact, beginning from early seventies till almost about mid-nineties, Oriya literature had a rich crop of short stories, and almost continuously new and newer writers were being added to the list, and ability and understanding continued as before. In addition, the range widened, and while grappling with the contemporary factors of living, the writers could show greater courage and insight. Among a host of fine and innovative writers, two writers may be noted – Prativa Ray (b. 1943) and Ramchandra Behera (b. 1945). Prativa, who otherwise achieved eminence as a novelist, has been extremely popular with the reading public, and has also been a very prolific writer. She has 18 story–collections so far, and apart from her range – she has an off-beat and interesting story collection entitled, **Bhagbanr Des** (1991), about the little known Banda tribes of Koraput district – she has keen insight into

the predicament of urban middle-class, and she has provided a powerful voice to contemporary feminism. Ramchandra, on the other hand, is not as prolific as Prativa. He has five story collections so far, and has about hundred stories to his credit. But they have been remarkable by their precise form, sharp insight and specific points of view. On the one hand, he is keenly aware of the individual's incapacity to face the disintegrating factors of life around him, on the other, his perception goes beyond to larger and more comprehensive factors of life that provide strength and sustenance to human living. Both Prativa's and Ramchandra's are representative voices of the new power and dimension that the Oriya short story has been acquiring since the early eighties.

Novel

Novel as a genre in the post-Independence Oriya literature has been dominated by Gopinath Mohanty about whom as well as about Surendra Mohanty, we have discussed earlier. But novel did not develop in the way poetry and short story did, Yet it attracted able and strong minds and beginning with the early fifties it has gone through several changes and developments, with more and more writers getting interested in the form. Today, at the end of the century, it appears to acquire newer strength and power. Among the early writers were Kanhu Charan Mohanty, Nityananda Mahapatra and Laxmidhar Nayak (b. 1914), They all had begun before Independence, but came to newer recognition and newer heights after that.

Kanhu Charan, a very popular novelist, whose novels in a way, created a strong taste for novel in the mid–century, had more than 60 novels to his credit, and wrote frequently of social issues and problems in a flowing style. In fact Kanhu Charan experimented with different themes, such as social, historical and psychological and even themes dealing with evolution of mankind. Among his well-known early novels were **Hā Anna** and **Sāsti** (Punishment, 1946) both written in the background of 1866 famine of Orissa, and dealt with such issues as love, sacrifice, widow remarriage and caste restriction etc. Some of his later novels were **Kā** (Shadow) and **Jhanjā** (The Storm) etc. that dealt with man-woman relationship, family ties and social restrictions. Kanhu Charan's novels were fine portraits of the years before and after Independence,

and his tolerant tone and compromising attitude had a great appeal to the middle class sentiment.

Mahapatra also wrote about social issues, with references to political changes and changes in rural life, and put emphasis on communicating values and morals. His important novels published after Independence were **Hidamāti** (The Soil of the Paddy Field), **Bhangāhāda** (Broken Bones, 1956) and **Gharadhia** (Homestead Land, 1986), which constituted a loose triology that depicted the changes in Orissa's rural life, changes towards loss and disintegration. Particularly, **Gharadiha**, his longest and best work, shows this most powerfully through disintegrating conditions of life after Independence. Laxmidhar Nayak, who also wrote poems and plays and participated in agitations in the Oriya speaking outlying tracts of Orissa, wrote prolifically. Beginning from the themes of love and passion, when his early novels like **Bhulila Sate Sakhi** (Oh Dear, Have You Forgotten) and **Hā Re Durbhāgā Desa** (Oh, My Unfortunate Country) became instant hits, he has gone over to nationalism and political chicanery, and finally to problems of complicated industrial life and living. His style is as felicitous as Kanhu Charan's, and his depth of vision almost equals Surendra Mohanty's. Among his well–known novels, are, **Se Mari Nāhin** (He is not Dead), **Mo Swapnara Sahar** (The City of my Dreams, 1979) and **Sei Ālua Pāin** (For that Light) etc.

Social issues, particularly human relationships and the complexities within a family and among its members, have always attracted Oriya novelists. A remarkable novel published in the early fifties was **Amadabata** (The Untrodden Way) by Basant Kumari Pattanaik (b. 1927), who wrote very sparingly. She also wrote a sequel to **Amadābāta**, entitled **Chorābāli** (The Hidden Sands). **Amadabata** deals with a middle class family at Cuttack and its attempts to get the daughter married. The novel has aspects of feminism, and shows keen insight and understanding of the subject. Ms. Pattanaik's brother, Rajkishore Pattanaik, a senior and more prolific writer, was also an able writer, his most well–known novel being **Chalābāta** (The Trodden Path). But a younger novelist Santanu kumar Acharya (b. 1933) emerged as an innovative novelist in the sixties and seventies. He had a good range – beginning with a symbolic novel **Nara Kinnar** (Man Half Man, 1962), he moved to novels with autobiographical overtones, and later to political

attitudes (**Sakuntalā**, 1980). Acharya has understanding and insight, and often goes beyond what is on the surface, to essential substantiality.

A desire to achieve an integrity in perception and to give a shape to one's own identity, along with a capacity to organise a story, characterised two other writers, who also emerged as leading novelists in the seventies and eighties. They were Satakadi Hota (b. 1930) and Bibhuti Pattanaik (b. 1937). Hota has about 16 novels to his credit, **Asānta Aranya** (Restless Forest, 1984) and **Rājdhānir Ranga** (The Colour of the Capital, 1988) being two of his well–known novels. The former is an account of courage and grace seen in the personality of a woman in the context of tribal and political unrest in the jungles of Bangiriposhi, in Mayurbhanja, and the latter was an unrelenting exposure of the rot that has gone into the entails of urban life – a broad-based vision. Pattanaik, in contrast to Hota, is a very prolific writer, and has about 70 novels so far to his credit. His first novel **Ei Gan Ei Mati** (This Village This Earth) based on post-Independence Oriya village life, was written in the fifties. Although most of Pattanaik's novels (as also his stories) are motivated by an awareness of urban life, the village as such, and the rural life patterns, have also provided him with a rich stock for contrast and analysis. Some of his well–known books are, **Chapalchhandā** (Of Restless Feet), **Sultanā** (Sultana), **Rāga Anurāg** (Love Counter Love), **Bandi Jājābar** (The Imprisoned Bohemian, 1986), **Dipa Talar Drusya** (The Scene under the Lamp, 1988), **Badhu Nirupamā** etc. Pattanaik's novels have a broad sweep, and display a keen sensitiveness and intelligence in the assessment of present–day life.

Like Hota and Pattanaik, the other considerable novelist to emerge in the recent years, is Prativa Roy, who has also achieved eminence as a story teller. She has about 18 novels so far including such well–known books as **Silāpadma** (The Stone as Lotus, 1983), a novel on Konarka, **Yājnaseni** (Jajnaseni, 1984), a novel related to the Mahabharat from the point of view of Draupadi, **Uttaramārga** (The Road After, 1988) an account of freedom struggle in Ms. Roy's own area, and **Adibhumi** (The Primal Land), a novel on the Bandas, a tribal group of Koraput. Ms. Roy's works have a variety of subject matter and interest. A good example is **Jājnaseni** which apart from being an account of the Mahabhrat, is also a study of relationship, a probe into the mental states

of distress, dismay and emptiness, and a protest against male chauvinism. Ms. Roy's understanding of contemporary existence is both acute and penetrating.

It would be appropriate to mention two other novelists at this point. One is Dayalal Joshi (b. 1926), from Baragad in western Orissa whose language is a pleasant mix of standard Oriya with Sambalpuri dialect, and who in such novels as **Satlejru Jirā** (From Sutle to Zeera) and **Banamālati** (The Forest Flower) published in the eighties, tried to uphold the Gandhian ideals of honesty, sacrifice and goodness; and whose recent novel entitled **Pratidhwani** (Echoes, 1996) is an open exposure of political hyprocrisy and dishonesty. The other novelist is Balaram Pattanaik (b. 1928) from Puri, whose first novel Shikār (The Hunt) was published in 1956. Since then Pattanaik has a total of 24 novels. Most of his early novels dealt with low-lying, downtrodden and defeated people of the society seen almost always with compassion and sympathy. At a latter stage his vision encompassed larger chunks of humanity and grew in depth and perspective. A good example is **Mahānadir Dheu** (The Waves of Mahanadi, 1985) which gives a comprehensive account of the life of farmers and fishermen in and around the mouth of the river Mahanadi before the Paradeep port was built – an unusual novel, almost of epic proportion, with the charm and warmth of a vital local life. Similarly, another unusual work is Pattanaik's recent tetralogy, now published in one volume entitled **Jagannath Swāmi** (2000) on Lord Jagannath of Puri and the folk culture related to the Lord, narrated in terms of the modern man's sorrows and suffering – a unique work of fine imagination and great devotion.

Drama

We have seen how, in a way Manoranjan Das's long career spans the whole movement of modern Oriya drama and has reflected its many changes. Independence shifted the theatre–goers taste from traditional historical and mythological plays towards plays with contemporary relevance. Coinciding with the early part of Manoranjan's career, till about early sixties, the writers who significantly contributed to Oriya dramatic literature were Gopal Chotroy (b. 1916), Ramachandra Misra (1921–1992), Bhanjakishor Pattanaik (1922–1999), and Basant Kumar

Mahapatra (1931–1990). Individually able dramatists, they highlighted various aspects of contemporary social and political problems. They had complete command over their form, were eminently successful on the stage, and for about 12 to 15 years after Independence their plays provided the main stay to professional theatre groups in Orissa.

Thus Gopal Chhotroy's plays, particularly **Bharasa** (The Support), **Sankhāsindura** (The Bangles and Vermillion) and **Parakalam** (The Feathered Pen), that were written and staged between 1952 and 1956, dealt with respectively, the life of an artist and his problems related to love and some basic principles of life; the negative emotions such as doubt, distrust and contempt in the context of a family ; and the dishonest and dirty manoeuvring of politicians and dirtiness of politics in general. Similarly Ramachandra Misra's important plays were staged in a period of 8 to 10 years after Independence. The plays were **Muliā** (The Labourer), **Gharasansār** (The Household), **Bhāibhāuja** (The Brother and Sister-in-Law) and **Sāipadisā** (The Neighbours). The plays generally dealt with the conflict of villages with the newly emerging towns, and the many allurements of the urban living as against the simple village life, and also how best good relationship can be established among the members of a family, and to what extent the family can be organized as a benign unit to function as a nucleus of a wholesome society. In Bhanjakishor too, most of his plays were written and staged between 1947 and 1960, some important representative plays being **Gariba** (The Poor), **Mānikjodi** (Manikjodi), **Sāānta Ghar** (The Master's House) and **Jayamālya** (The Garland of Victory) etc. Though in Pattanaik's plays, as in Chotroy's and Mishra's, the emphasis continues to be on the family – the family's cohesiveness and how best adjustments inside a family lead to happy life new elements could be seen at the same time related to the clash and conflict between the poor and the rich, and the exploiter and the exploited – a type of class conflict. Then as in Chotroy's play **Bharasa** so in Pattanaik's **Jayamālya**, we get the account of an artist – the sad account of a poor, distressed artist that ends tragically. Basant Kumar Mahapatra, the youngest of the group, who died untimely, was also a considerable and prolific dramatist. He too elaborated on the family's need and strength, but at the same time introduced new elements

like love and the psychological study of characters. Two of his representative plays were **Sesha Sraban** (The End of Rains) and **Jharābaula** (The Fallen Blossoms) that dealt with love, sacrifice and social compulsions in a charged emotional setup.

From the mid-sixties onwards, coinciding with the subsequent career of Manoranjan, comparatively younger writers came to prominence. They attempted to change the conventional chronicle and narrative frame of the drama which was mostly used by the earlier group, and even by Manoranjan in his early plays. They put greater emphasis on themes, attitudes and points of view and accordingly tried to shape their forms to their needs. The names to be mentioned in this connection are, Bijoy Mishra (b. 1936), Biswajit Das (b. 1936), Ramesh Chandra Panigrahi (b. 1943) and Kartik Chandra Rath (b. 1949). Bijoy had begun his career with traditional, though well-written plays, with emphasis on story and contemporary social and socio-political themes. But he developed towards a deeper perception of human existence, of attitudes and motivations, and the extent to which loss, distress and loneliness operate in life. Two of his representative plays of this mood were, **Sababāhaka Māne**, (The Pall–Bearers, 1968) which almost in the frame of a parable, tells us how in fact, the pall-bearers carry along their own deadness, and **Tata Niranjanā** (At the Bank of Niranjana, 1980), which in the frame of a Buddhist fable brought the realization that the attempts to renounce the world of suffering, illusion and death are meaningless as what is obtained instead is equally uncertain and illusory.

Biswajit, like Bijoy, had also traditional elements in the beginning. But he too, like Bijoy again, came to place greater emphasis on motivations and perceptions. **Nisipadma** (The Lotus of the Night), one of his early plays, staged in early sixties, showed how if veneer is taken off from man's underlying self what is exposed is only raw nakedness within. Subsequent plays such as **Nālipān Rāni O Kalāpān Tikā** (The Queen of Hearts and Ace of Spades, 1968), **Suna Sujane** (Hear, O Wisemen, 1969) and **Mrugayā** (The Hunt, 1970) have continued this essential preoccupation, and **Mrugayā** particularly, conveys in poignant language the immense futility and rootlessness which hunt the modern man. Biswajit's voice is both restless and agonized, and his attempts to come to terms with loss and despair is both tragic and courageous. Ramesh

and Kartik have similar motivations too, and their plays are almost symbolic expositions of the factors of living. Thus Ramesh's plays such as **Mu Ambhe O Ambhemāne** (I Myself, Us and We All, 1969), **Dhrutarāstrar Ākhi** (The Eyes of Dhrutarastra, 1972) and **Mahānātak** (The Great Drama, 1973) have intense ironical attitudes on the one hand in analyzing contemporary situations, and on the other present a strong sense of dislocation and uncertainty so far life is concerned. Similarly plays such as, **Trutiya Pruthibi** (The Third World, 1973), **Mānsara Phula** (The Flowers of Flesh, 1975), **Banhimān** (Aflamed, 1977) and **Iswar Jane Yubak** (God, a Youngman, 1979) by Kartik deal with deception, bestiality on the one hand, and despair, loneliness and emptiness on the other.

Prose etc.

An account of the post-Independence Oriya literature will not be complete without references to two other forms, that is, essay and autobiography, not so much the former as the latter. Essay or general prose had a rich growth before Independence and we have seen a substantial group of writers who wrote with distinction and were responsive to the prevalent intellectual climate. It is not so to that extent in the post–Independence years. Yet the few meritorious writers we come across do react inteliigently to the changing patterns of life as well as to its multiple complications. The best of the group has been Chittaranjan Das (b. 1923) who wrote in the tradition of earlier essayists on a variety of socio-cultural topics, and with great distinction and intelligence, and almost always with a view to developing man's sustaining power to live meaningfully and cogently. In Das, essay rose to a creative height which compared very favourably with the best such work done before Independence. He has a large number of essay collections so far, and some of his more important books include **Jiban Vidyālaya** (Life, a School), **Silā O Sālagrām** (The Stone and the Divine Stone), **Tarang O Tadit** (The Waves and Lightening) and differently, socio–cultural discussions, such as **Achyutānand O Panchasakhā** and **Odisār Mahimā Dharma** etc.

The other people who have made mark as essayists are Harekrushna Mahatab (1899–1987), Surendra Mohanty, Binod Kanungo (1912–1990),

Bhubaneswar Behera (1916–2001), Manmohan Chaudhury (b. 1915), Mohapatra Nilamani Sahu, Chandra Sekhar Rath and Manoj Das. Mahatab, an eminent politician, historian and novelist wrote a regular column entitled 'Gān Majlis' (The Village Gossip) in the daily **Prajatantra** that he edited. They were short, pithy pieces, almost like forceful discourses, and often with strong points of view, on a wide variety of topics related to contemporary cultural, social and political issues. These were subsequently collected in multiple volumes under the same title, and earned national recognition for Dr. Mahatab. Similarly, Surendra Mohanty, novelist and story teller, wrote a weekly column in the daily **Sambād**, under the title 'Sesha Stamba' (The Last Column). These were also short pieces, precisely organized in style, with a point of view, and on a variety of socio-cultural topics. In addition, unlike -Mahatab's which were mostly argumentative, impersonal pieces which were generally meant to carry their points home, Mohanty's were in the form of personal reminiscences, tempered with the creative writer's imagination, with a view not to persuade, but make the readers thoughtful. These pieces have been collected in multiple volumes under the same title.

Like Surendra Mohanty, Mahapatra Nilamani Sahu and Manoj Das, otherwise eminent story tellers, seasoned their essays with a fine ruminative, creative discourse. Particularly, Nilamani's pieces are almost like stories, full of an old world charm, and written in a very felicitous, colloquial Oriya. Manoj's style is sweeping, apparently academic, but has a quick sense of narration, and his pieces provide the readers with a pleasant taste of things far off and beyond his ken. Both Nilamani and Manoj are competent writers and their essays distinguish themselves not so much for their quality of argument or intelligence, as for emotional involvement, communicated with wit, humour and irony. Their books include such titles as **Debadāsara Drustipāta** (As Devadas Sees) and **Kete Diganta** (So Many Horizons) respectively, which were originally serialized, as in the case with Mahatab and Mohanty, in the daily **Dharitri**, in the eighties.

Chandrasekhar Rath has a flowing rhetorical style and his essays are mostly concerned with cultural matrix. Some of his more important books are **Mana Aranya** (The Mind like a Forest), **Asruta Swara** (Unheard

Voice), and **Drusti O Darsan** (A Vision and a Philosophy) all published in the seventies. But both Binod Kanungo and Manmohan Chaudhury are differently motivated, and their essays, instead of being like creative features as in Nilamani, Manoj or Surendra Mohanty are more like Chitaranjan Das's essays. This is particularly so in Manmohan Chaudhury who being a social activist, writes discursive pieces on socio-cultural as well as contemporary political issues with clarity, argument and specific points of view. His best book, and probably one of the best books in the area of modern Oriya essay is **Hātabazārara Brahmajnān** (The Wisdom of the Market Place, 1981). But Binod Kanungo's essays have their own specific uniqueness, in the sense that they are written mostly on abstract topics like, 'Idleness', 'Foolishness', 'Greed' etc. in a highly concentrated form, but in a felicitous style. They were originally written for his encyclopedia **Gnānmandal** and are sharp, pithy and intelligent pieces. The same can be said of Bhubaneswar Behera, basically an academician, whose essays combined an impersonal rational structure with the pleasant, personal style of a belles–lettrist. His well-known books are **Suna Parikhya** (O Parikhya Listen) and **Sahabsthān** (Coexistence) written in the seventies.

But the autobiography, interestingly, has emerged as a much developed form during this period. Of course, the first most remarkable autobiography, a fine creative work, was Phakirmohan's, but that was written in the beginning of the 20th century. But it was not until after Independence that the autobiography as a form was taken up seriously by the writers. People from different professions, such as – politicians, administrators, academicians and social activists, as if vied with one another to set down their experiences, and wrote in styles appropriate to themselves. By a rough accounting, in a period of about 50 years, since Independence, there had been more than 60 autobiographies, and they provide an excellent documentation of Oriya life and society, and offer frank and open points of view on contemporary situations. Thus first of all, there are senior writers whose autobiographies provide interesting insight into their creative careers, such as, Gopinath Mohanty, Surendra Mohanty, Kalicharan Pattanaik, Kalindi Charan Panigrahi, Kunjabihari Das, Manoranjan Das and even Nilakantha Das and Godabaris Misra etc. Secondly, there are political leaders and political and social

activists whose autobiographies are almost like fine documentations of their own socio-political engagements, such as, Harekrushna Mahatab, Nilamoni Routray (b. 1920), Surendra Dwibedi (1912–2001), Binod Kanungo, Braja Kishor Dhal (1912–2001), Sm. Rama Devi (1899–1985), Alekh Prasad Das (1902–2000) and Manmohan Choudhury, etc. Thirdly, there are administrators, academicians and journalists, such as Bharat Nayak (1887–1969), Gananath Das (1913–2000), Krushna Chandra Panigrahi (1909–1969), Bhubaneswar Behera etc. whose autobiographies give good accounts of their professions. Lastly, there are lawyers who have given interesting accounts not only of their professions, but have also written about their own trials and tribulations on their rise to eminence, such as Harihar Mahapatra (1904–1994), Rajkishor Das and Gangadhar Rath, etc.

The above is a selective list. As has been said, autobiography as a form has become very popular with the writers, and that too, only after Independence. Beginning from sheer documentation, through selective accounts of selected incidents of life, to a creative joy in looking at one's own life objectively, autobiographies in Oriya do have many categories. But on the whole, it may be said, that autobiography has come to stay in Oriya as a viable, responsible and responsive form drawing many powerful minds from different areas of activity.

Thus, beginning from the later nineteenth century, till today, for more than a century, Oriya literature has developed like any living being, full of vivacity and strength, continually responding to changes. The above account, although selective and brief, provides a perspective, highlights the main landmarks and directs the search through main channels. Even though Independence comes as a convenient watershed, the history of modern Oriya literature is an unbroken continuity with changing approaches and taste. But viewed differently, considering all the changes that came after Independence, and the new attitudes and approaches that emerged, there appears to have been a radical departure from the past. The post–Independence period in Oriya literature reflects views and attitudes never thought of before. All these were compactly woven with the new times that came and spearheaded the understanding of a new generation. The modern Oriya literature has been a growing

entity, and the ideas of modernity have gone on changing from time to time. But basically it has been a product of, and a reaction to contemporary realities, and has been involved with attempts of providing that with a meaningful form.

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3

RAMAYANA TRADITION IN ORIYA : A STUDY

Though the origin of Oriya language can be traced to a time before the 10th century A.D., the written literature in Oriya began sometime in the 14th century, and the two early important literary productions in Oriya were the **Mahabharat** and the **Ramayana**. The **Mahabharat** was written by Sarala Das in the 15th century, and the **Ramayana** by Balaram Das, a little later, in the early part of the 16th century. Both were based on the original epics and largely conformed to their patterns. Thus, the **Mahabharat** was divided into 18 parts and the **Ramayana** into 7 parts, and the familiar characters were all neatly arranged and displayed, the purpose being to promote the knowledge and experiences of the great epics among common men who had no access to Sanskrit originals. The style of writing and the language they used also conformed to this primary purpose. They depended on contemporary conversational language and used a metrical pattern which had a poetical rhythmicality combined with the elasticity and freedom of prose. It was called 'Dāndi' metre or 'Dandi bruta', and since the epics were meant to be read out, the auditory aspect was important, and the metre moved like the waves of the sea, rising and falling, stretching and contracting, so that the attention of the listeners is kept up in the relaxed, lazy hours in the evenings. Also what they hear, linguistically, is only an extension of their daily routine of conversation so that the mind is not unnecessarily taxed to comprehend new words or new verbal conjugation of words.

This is one aspect – this emphasis on contemporary, conversational language. Both Sarala and Balaram used contemporary Oriya language with great skill and dexterity. For the first time sensitive writers were found out who could exploit the virgin richness of the language with imagination and competence. At the same time they succeeded in imposing a form and discipline on the wild nebulosity of the contemporary speech, which not only communicated its essential strength but also became a model for a large number of subsequent writers. The other

aspect was equally important. It was manifested in the freedom to be found both in Sarala and Balaram – the freedom from the restraints of the original epics. What Sarala and Balaram did, is not what is called 'translation'. Neither they indulged in adaptation or recreation. They took the original frame – none of the major events or sequences of events were distorted, or the actions of the major characters changed. But they brought in innumerable details – physical, social, political and psychological – in conformity with the contemporary times and contemporary taste, and the Oriya **Mahabharat** and the **Ramayana**, instead of being the pale imitations of the great original epics, became great Oriya epics themselves, full of freshness and vigour, projecting the confidence and pride of a nation at the apex of its political power during the reigns of Emperor Kapilendra Dev, and the subsequent kings of the Sun Dynasty.(15th–16th centuries)

The scholars have found out many 'deviations' in Sarala and Balaram, particularly in contrast to the original epics. No doubt it is an academic exercise, but a useful one, and it particularly highlights not the so called 'deviations' but the originality of the concerned writers. A good local example is the story of the rishi Rushyasrunga in the **Ramayana** of Balaram Das. In the original Valmiki Ramayana the story is given briefly, as a narration by the charioteer Sumanta to King Dasaratha. Balaram has taken up the main outlines, such as the absence of rains in Angadesha, the king's worries, the advice given to him by the Brahmins and the ministers, the choice of public–women to bring Rushyasrunga from the forest, the deception played by the women on Rushyasrunga, the coming of Rushyasrunga to Angadesha and the final coming of rains. But the main outlines have been filled in with innumerable details and with such turns and changes, so that an almost functional account of the original epic, now vibrates with the force and excitement of an intense human drama in Balaram. On the one hand, the king's worries and despair at the scarcity of rains and the lack of fertility as related to land, assumes an almost symbolic proportion in modern terms. On the other, as the Saint's innocence is seen along with the urban sexual wiliness of the dancing women, the account is elevated to an almost archetypal form where the primitive purity and innocence is not only matched but is ultimately defeated by wily, permissive urban culture. In addition,

there are perceptive accounts of place, natural objects, and of animals and birds, as well as the excitement of journey along the river, and the moods of fear, uncertainty and hesitation on the parts of women who go to a distant land almost in a spirit of adventure. The journey by river from Angadesha to the 'forest of four-hills', where Rushyasrunga stayed, and back, took 40 days, the poet points out, and it was mostly through impenetrable jungles full of wild and strange animals and birds. This is how the poet narrates:

And they went through days and nights without rest
And through innumerable forests and hills
Dark, impenetrable, fearsome.
Strange things they saw and strange sights
And birds and animals, looking astonished, amazed.
The tigers run after deer
And lions on elephants, tearing, roaring,
And wild cats quarrel everywhere
And peacocks dance and scream,
And the strange melancholic cry
From inside the deep, dark forest.

Differently, another good example of Balaram's originality can be seen in the poet's account of Rama's entry into the city of Mithila. Valmiki does not speak anything about it. But Balaram describes Rama's entry in great detail and with saucy references. This is seen particularly with references to young women, irrespective of whether married or unmarried, who madly ran out of their houses into the streets to have a look at Rama. All their dresses were dishevelled and they all were extremely excited :

They all ran, excited, crazed
And the Love's arrow pierced every heart.
Somebody's clothes slipped from her breast
Somebody lifted her clothes to show her thighs,
Somebody smiled, somebody cast a sidelong glance.
Somebody showed her armpits
Somebody opened her tresses,
And their jewels fell from their hair
And gold chains fell from their necks

And their flowers were scattered.
Their clothes flew like flags in the wind
They all ran, heavy with youth
Crowded the streets and pushed their elders
And tears of happiness streamed from their eyes.

Balaram was not only the first, but the greatest writer who adapted the original Ramayana and made of it a great Oriya epic. Apart from its imaginative excellence, it was almost a complete document like Sarala's **Mahabharat,** of the times he lived in. That was a time of great confidence and pride for the Oriyas, and Balaram's great work was a part of that ebullient Oriya spirit. That was almost the time of Tulsi Das, and Balaram's pre-eminence in Oriya, particularly as related to Ramayana, was almost like Tulsi's pre-eminence in Hindi an unchallenged, unparalleled creative excellence.

Balaram's model and inspiration was followed by many subsequent writers, and at least three important streams in Ramayana tradition could be seen in Oriya poetry after Balaram. The first was to continue the Ramayana as such, that is, the continuous efforts on the part of the poets to acquaint the new and newer generations with the stories of Ramayana for their entertainment and edification. This was never done as comprehensively as Balaram did, but in much shorter form, in 7 parts no doubt, but mostly sticking to the essentials, as a racy, narrative account, and almost always in the form of songs. The songs had a lot of metrical varieties and were often composed with familiar and popular ragas or tunes. These were widely sung by the villagers and often staged as musical performances in the summer nights. These were called 'Lilās', and the tradition of 'Ramlila' has continued in the Orissan villages till contemporary times. The most popular of these musical compositions and probably the best, was by Biswanath Khuntia, who belonged to the 18th century. It was entitled **Vichitra Ramayana**. Its entire emphasis was how best, and in essentials, to tell the Ramayana story, which it did in great competence and in memorable musical pieces. Many of its ragas or tunes were well-known, popular tunes, such as 'Rāmakeri', 'Chakrakeli', 'Jamak', 'Kāmodi', 'Chokhi', 'Kanada' etc., and they not only made the perennially appealing stories of Rama and Sita more appealing, but they also communicate the ever refreshing scents and

sounds of Orissa's innumerable villages and their paddy fields and mango groves.

The second line of development related to kavyas which took up particular sequences from the Ramayana, or may be one or two major sequences, in a short form, and from particular points of view, and organized them in imaginative rhetorical compositions. Though kavyas constituted a large part of ancient and medieval Oriya poetry, and in a span of about 400 years, from the 16th to the 19th century, more than 60 kavyas were written, the kavyas dealing with Rama-theme or Rama stories are not many. The first such work which had elements of a kavya but which was in a sense, a recreation of a part of the great epic and strictly did not belong to the kavya genre, was also entitled **Vichitra Ramayana** by Sarala Das, before Balaram. It was based on the 'Uttrā Kanda' of Ramayana, though with a number of deviations, and narrated the story of Ramayana beginning from the banishment of Sita from Ayodha till her death in Ayodha, in the court of Rama. It was one of the three works of the great poet, the other two being the **Mahabharat** and **Chandi Purana**, and was probably written before the **Mahabharat**. It did not have much of imaginative aspects one comes across in kavyas, whether thematically or sylistically, and yet parts of it throb with intense emotion, and its language had the vibrant force of the contemporary colloquial speech. But the first kavya in rhymed–metre dealing with Rama theme was entitled **Rama Bibhā** (The Marriage of Rama), which was written after Balaram's great work, in the 16th century, by Arjun Das. The story centres on the marriage of Rama and his brothers, and Rama's subsequent return to Ayodha, and his encounter on the way with the great hero Parasuram. The story is told racily, in simple language, and in many ragas, with occasional use of imagery. Thus, this is how the poet describes the anger of Parasuram and the fear he injected in Dasarath's army:

> His lips trembled and eyes became red,
> And he breathed rapidly
> Like the winds of the Last Conflagration.
> As he rose the seven seas and islands trembled
> And a great panic seized the court of Indra.
> He rose up in great anger clanging his weapons

As if the earth's axel was uprooted
And thrown into the great ocean.....
Then a great panic seized Dasaratha' soldiers,
'He comes, He comes,' they shouted,
And groups of jackals howled all around,
And all fled - chariots, elephants,
Across the forest.

But the best work in this kavya tradition was **Baidehisa Bilās** (The Story of Baidehi) by Upendra Bhanja, the famous 18th century poet. It is the complete story of Ramayana in 52 'chhandas' or verse–chapters, till Rama's return to Ayodha with Sita, and their coronation. Upendra took his models from Sanskrit , including Kalidas, as well as from Balaram, and modelled each chhanda as a perfect specimen of stylistic and imaginative excellence with liberal use of imagery and rhetorical devices. Upendra's chhandas are often sung in the countryside in Orissa and many of them have become a part and parcel of the rich poetic heritage of Oriya consciousness. A fine example is when Sita is brought to the marriage-altar. She is as fresh as fresh flowers and as beautiful, and she is decorated with bright jewels and ornaments. She comes 'walking on the heads of misfortunes and makes Rama happy', who feels as if 'soft sandalwood is pasted on his body' She is Sita, the 'epitome of all sweetness and purity', and she has 'killed the hearts' and scattered the seeds of love'. In this connection two more such kavyas may be mentioned. One preceded Upendra, by his grandfather Dhananjoy Bhanja (17th century) and was entitled **Raghunath Bilas**, and the other after Upendra, by Jadumani Mohapatra (18th-19th century), and was entitled **Raghab Bilas**. They were like Upendra's famous kavya, more or less a retelling of Ramayana story, and in the same rhetorical tradition, and in 'riti' style.

A fine kavya in this tradition, and with a difference, was written and published in the modern times, in 1915. It was **Tapaswini** (The Lady Ascetic) by Gangadhar Meher (1862–1924), a fine, pioneering modern poet. It is in 11 'sargas' or verse–chapters, each 'sarga' having a different raga and narrates the happiness and ordeals of Sita in Valmiki's heritage during her banishment. The entire story has been told from the point of view of Sita, she being the most important character who gathers plenty

of love and adoration from all around, including birds, animals, flowers, rivers, even dawn and moonlit night. The account of dawn breaking over the hermitage, and the Dawn coming to wake up Sita from her sleep, is one of the most popular pieces in modern Oriya literature:

She came like blossoming lotus-flower
In happiness, to see Sita,
And holding in her leaf-like palms diamond-like dews
And staying outside her house
She spoke in Cuckoo's voice -
'O Lady, wake up ! The night is over'.
The wind sang songs,
The bumble bee played on lyre,
The pitcher birds like heralds sang Sita's eulogies,
And the black song-bird came and said sweetly,
'O Sita, the great Queen, wake up! The night is over'.

Tapaswini is a fine work of art, where both nature and man are competing organic beings, and where the readers are taken out of the traditional Ramayana moorings to contemplate on a fine human being, that is, Sita, with sympathy and understanding, and where Ramayana sheds off its remoteness to become a part of the modern man's livingness and his desire for tranquillity.

The third stream can be traced in short poetical pieces, written from time to time, by different authors, on small, apparently minor items from Ramayana, to illustrate a mood or motive or an aspect of a character or a part of a situation. Probably the first such piece was by Sankar Das (16th century) entitled *Bārамāsi Koili*. It is an address-poem, to cuckoo, and narrates the unhappiness of Kausallya thinking of the ordeals of Rama, her son in the forest as the seasons change. As the months pass, the seasons change, and the rigour of nature also changes. Thus the cold of winter changes to parching heat of summer and then to darkness of incessant rains. Kausallya laments what would be the fate of a shelterless man in the forest ! Even when the seasons change to better, in autumn and spring, to clear horizons and moonlit nights, the sorrow is equally pinching thinking of better days in the past, in the palace. It is an interesting poem, and shows the simple but intense unhappiness of a mother who has missed her child. An equally fine poem in this category

was entitled *Jānaki Smaran Chautisā* (In Memory of Janaki) by Dinakrushna Das, a major poet and contemporary of Upendra Bhanja. It is in the form of a 'chautisa' that is, 4-line stanzas to each of the letters of alphabet, and a total 34 stanzas, narrating Rama's sorrows at Malyabanta hills on being separated from Sita. Rama goes over many details of their intimate conjugal life, fears that he may not see Sita again, and feels lost that this could at all happen to him :

O my lady, I hoped so much from you
But you cut my throat and vanished in the jungle,
O my dearest, I am lost !
O my fair-complexioned one, how could you act so !
We left our homes and came to the forest,
O my Cuckoo-voiced !
Who took you away ? And how ?
O dearest, O round-breasted one !
I know the god's don't care for my sorrow.

Dinakrushna's poem throbs with passion, and Rama's sorrow becomes like the sorrow of anybody who is so separated from his lady.

Two other poems that may be mentioned in this connection are by Madhusudan Rao, a major modern poet. Madhusudan wrote two poems, one entitled **SriRam Banabāsa** (Ram's Banishment) and the other **Sita Banabasa** (Sita's Banishment). Obviously the element of melancholy inherent in both the situations attracted the poet, and the poems too, have a strong sense of melancholy and unhappiness. Thus as in the former, the condition of Ayodha on hearing Rama's banishment:

How shall I describe the condition of Ayodha
Sunken suddenly in great melancholy
Tears flowed from thousands of homes,
The bright, glorious morning vanished
And a deep darkness covered all.

Ramayana like the Mahabharat has been a potent factor in the growth of Oriya literature as a whole, though its influence has not been as deep as the latter's has been on modern Oriya writers. Yet it has played a strong role in shaping attitudes, motives and visions of Oriya writers, particularly poets, during the last about 400 years. In contrast to Krishna literature which brought deep passions of love and separation, and

involvement and ecstasy, Rama-literature in Oriya led the creative minds to greater degrees of contemplation and meditation as well as to larger elements of tranquillity, and in essence, to a fuller understanding of life and livingness. As Tagore pointed out long ago, this livingness is the strongest aspect of Ramayana. It is not in facts, but somewhere beyond facts that it provides illumination into the pattern of living in India – an illumination vibrant and joyful. Oriya creative spirit, like Indian creative spirit elsewhere, shares this illumination and joy.

* * *

4

THE MAHABHARAT AND THE MODERN ORIYA WRITERS : A STUDY OF ATTITUDE

At the outset, probably it would be interesting to look briefly at the first Oriya work on Mahabharat, which incidentally was the first great work in Oriya literature. The time was 15th century Orissa, the time of great Gajapati Kapilendra Dev, who ruled over a vast stretch of land, from Ganga in the north to Kavery in the south, all along the eastern coast of India; and the writer was Sarala Das, a 'sudra' poet, who belonged to Cuttack district, to a place about 60 kms. towards the east from the present Cuttack city, and probably participated or had intimate knowledge about many warfares which Kapilendra waged during his regime. His **Mahabharat** was a complete work, complete in the 18 Parvas. But instead of a translation, it was what Dryden called an 'imitation', where 'liberty' was assumed not only to vary from the word and senses but 'to forsake them both as one sees the occasion'. **Sāralā Mahabharat**, as it is popularly called, was to a large measure an original work, and to that extent it laid the foundation of subsequent Oriya literature. Sarala adapted the general frame of the original Sanskrit epic, but made extensive changes in the details, through omissions, additions and elaborations, all along the purpose being to produce such a work that would be reckoned as having the warmth, vitality and intimacy of the local life, particularly of the riverine delta of the river Mahanadi to which he belonged.

Sarala's great epic was a complete document of its times and it reflected all types of manners, habits, faiths and activities of a proud, self-conscious and empire-building nation. The writing of **Mahabharat**, it may be pointed out, was not just another poetical act, but was basically the projection of a way of life and an integrated attitude towards living as a sustaining force at a time when the very existence of the nation was being threatened by continuous Muslim invasions from the north and the west (in fact the nation would be losing its independence in less than 100 years, in mid–16th century), and this he did through a known

mythological structure, through familiar stories, characters etc. which together provided an almost aesthetic distance to the whole work.

Oriya literature that almost began from Sarala, was mostly in poetry till mid–19th century, when other literary forms developed. Sarala's great work influenced many subsequent poets who took episodes and stories from it and developed them into kavyas. Some important examples were **Ushābhilās** (The Desires of Usha) by Sisu Sankar (16th century), **Kapatapāsā** (The False Dice Game) by Bhima Dhibar (17th century), **Subhadrā Parinaya** (The Marriage of Subhadra) by Upendra Bhanja (17th-18th century) and **Sulakhyana** (Sulakhyana) by Abhimanyu Samanta Sinhar (18th century). Except **Kapatapasa** the other three were written in medieval kavya–style with subject matter related to love. Thus **Ushabhilas** deals with the love–relationship between Usha, Banasura's daughter, and Anirudha, Pradyumna's son, the subsequent quarrel between Sri Krishna and Banasura, and the final happy resolution; **Subhadra Parinaya** deals with the love-relationship between Subhadra and Arjuna, Subhadra's abduction, the impending battle between Balaram and Arjuna, and the final happy resolution. Similarly **Sulakhyana** deals with the love–relationship between Sulakhyana, Duryodhana's daughter and Samba, Sri Krishna's son, the impending battle between Duryodhan on the one hand and Krishna and Balaram on the other, and the final happy resolution. The purpose in all the three kavyas has been mainly to entertain the readers with fictional and musical elaborations of youthful love in ornamental and rhetorical language. The attitude was clear. It was not so much as to project a new point of view on the episodes of Mahabharat, nor as in Sarala to provide a national saga, but to conform to current kavya–tradition as much as possible. But **Kapatapasa**, a very popular work, was an exception. It is a small kavya in 10 cantos and it mainly gives an account of Draupadi's insult in the court of Duryodhana, after the defeat of Yudhisthir in the dice–game. The poet was a fisherman by caste, but what is more important is that, it was at a level different from the rhetorical kavya–tradition of the time. It was written in a simple, colloquial language with many realistic details, and with a strong flavour of naturalness. In details it conforms the original in Sarala, but the main purpose has been to highlight the basic nature of main characters with a view to

moralizing and providing a lesson in reform of the evil and the wrong–doer.

But until one comes to the later part of the 19th century, to a poet like Radhanath Roy, one does not become aware of powerful poetic attitudes and reactions to the great epic in consonance with the problems and complications of modern life and modern existence. Radhanath composed two kavyas and two long poetical pieces based on the Mahabharat, of which three were direct narrations of the Mahabharat episodes, and the other one, one of the finest works of the poet, while beginning with an important Mahabharat situation, deviated into many other details. In all these the Mahabharat provides the structure as well as the motive-force, but the readers become strongly conscious of a new poet, new taste and times. Of these the most important is the last mentioned one, entitled **Mahājātrā** (The Last Journey). It was conceived as an epic to be completed in 30 cantos of which 4 were only completed. It was written in blank verse, the first such attempt in Oriya poetry, and to that extent merits comparison with Michael Madhusudan's Bengali epic **Meghanada Baddha**. But in subject matter, in treatment, as well as in attitudes, it completely differs from Michael's work. It begins with the Pandavas making preparations for their final exit, and leaving Hastinapur forever. But instead of moving northwards towards the Himalayas, they move to the east, cross the entire Gangetic plain, and taking turn to the south near the sea, on the coast, they come to Utkal and to Puri. At Puri, on the sea–beach, they were met by Agni, the God of Fire, a resplendent, divine being who rose from the sea. On his request Arjun sacrificed all his glittering weapons in the sea. Then Agni gave company to the Pandavas and guided them across Orissa and through middle India to the west, and finally came to Sahyadri Hills on the Western Ghats. There, while sitting on the Sahyadri Hills, in the last hours of the last night of 'Dwapar Yuga', and gifted with a future–vision by Agni, the Pandavas saw first of all, the descent of *Kali*, the Evil, with all his forces on earth ; and secondly, the future history of India till the Muslim invasion of India in the 12th century, and the battles of King Pruthiraj Chuhan of Delhi. Thus apparently what the Pandavas saw and the poet points out, was an account of India's history, full of political uncertainties and dissensions, till Hindu India lost its

independence. But basically what concerns the poet is given in the statement of Agni – a serious concern for a continuous decay in values and a fall in the quality of life, when the whole nation is taken over by *Kali* or the Evil, and his followers. The poet's agony is deep and pointed - "The flood of sin is coming/And the noble minds that may save Bharat/ Will be drowned like an island in the waters of sin/Alas, in this deluge all will be lost./Like no place for a sandal wood tree in the rank growth of forest /You (Yudhisthir) will have no place here". And again:

> All will be there,
> The same country, the hills, the rivers,
> The cities and places of pilgrimage,
> All will be as before,
> But the man will be only man in name,
> He will be worse than animal
> In the changing times, in Bharat.

In fact the motivating word for the poet is *dharma*, and elaborating on a Mahabharat situation he points out how or to what extent 'dharma' has lost its roots in the quagmire of sin, evil and selfishness. In addition, that which has been woven as an almost integral part of the total structure of **Mahajatra** (as also in all other poems of Radhanath) is the poet's strong concern for Orissa as an entity, that is, all details beginning from rivers and mountains to people and places and to gods and goddesses. Even the poet's admiration for Orissa has risen to such rhetorical statement as in the address of Agni to the Pandavas – "It is your great good luck that you are here /At this holiest place in the whole world/Which the great Lord has chosen as His only abode in the whole of Bharat/ And as a flower crowns a pad of leaves/ So this land/This bright, glorious Utkal, crowns all." In **Mahajatra**, the Mahabharat situation only provides a stepping–stone to other types of feelings which on the one hand, are related to an awareness of waste and decay and the presence of evil in life, and on the other, to emotions of pleasure, excitement and joy in contemplating the country's manifold beauties, and thirdly, both pride and melancholy associated with a strong though subtle nationalistic spirit.

But this is not the case with the other poems of Radhanath that dealt with Mahabharat themes, though they had their own individual merits.

Thus the other kavya **Beni Sanhar** which dealt with Dushasan's last battle with Bhima, in which he was defeated and killed by the latter, closely follows the Mahabharat episode. But the poet has his own purpose, that is, to justify action against the evil and sinful, and to uphold the powers of 'dharma'. Thus, first of all, the poem narrates the action in concrete, physical terms, even at times, in gruesome physical details. Secondly, there is a continuing chain of similes and comparisons largely related to mutual hostilities, and thirdly the tone is exclusively organized to communicate a strong emotion of anger. As in **Mahajatra**, so also here, while the mythological situation continues, the reader at the sametime becomes aware of a new sensibility and new times. In this connection another poetical piece of Radhanath, a long poem, may be cited. It is interesting in the sense that it has psychological bearings and it almost exclusively communicates the sense of pathos and despair. This piece, which is based on an original account in Sarala, is entitled **Duryodhanar Raktanadi Santarana** (The Crossing of the River of Blood by Duryadhana). It describes how Duryodhana while escaping from the battle ground of Kurukhetra at the end, alone and helpless, is obstructed by a wide river of blood flowing from the innumerable dead. In his attempts to cross the river as quickly as possible to safety, he tried to take the help of floating corpses of great heroes like Drona and Karna etc., but failed, as each one of the corpses sank under his weight. Finally a corpse, looking bright even in death, carried him across, and when Duryodhana wanted to know whose it was, to his great woe, he found that it was his eldest son Lakhman's. There is pity and irony in the situation as well as the traditional meaning of the son supporting the father. But the new, psychological attitude and the approach to reality are obvious in the account.

Radhanath's model was taken up by his friend Gangadhar Meher, in his kavya **Kichaka Baddha** (The Killing of Kichaka). The story follows the sequences of the Mahabharat, with the advances of Kichaka to Draupadi and ending with his death in the hands of Bhima. But the treatment was new, almost in the manner of Radhanath's kavyas, with flights of imagination, chains of imagery, lively accounts of morning, evening and spring, and above all in extremely musical cantos. Radhanath himself, in a brief preface to the book (1904), pointed this

out when he referred to Gangadhar's power to present the ancient tale in a 'new shape'. In fact both Gangadhar and Radhanath had in view the need of a new time, and catered to the new taste of a generation trained in Western education and aware of the rich heritage of Western literature. The attitude to the Mahabharat was undergoing a change. The attempt was to treat the Mahabharat no longer as a store–house of stories and story-sequences with didactic or moralistic lessons, but in terms of its significance in the perspective of new poetic consciousness, by itself a product of the emerging urban society.

This attitude becomes more eloquent as we come over to relatively more modern writers around Independence. Thus Kalindi Charan Panigrahi, an important poet and novelist, and a leader of the new poetic movement in the thirties, took up Abhimanyu's last desperate fight inside Drona's Circle–Labyrinth and his mental condition when all exits have been closed, to express acute helplessness in the midst of completely adverse forces. Similarly another contemporary important poet, Baikunthanath Pattanik took up Arjun's mental distress and helplessness at the death of Krishna, and particularly at his own defeat in the hands of the Dasyus on his way to Hastinapur, to express modern man's lonely and sterile condition of mind when the nourishing forces are either removed or dead. Also Sachidananda Routray, a major poet after Independence, took up the Mahabharat reference in one of his poems entitled *Jojanagandha*. The reference was to Satyabati in her pre-marriage days, when a sweet fragrance from her body was said to have filled the atmosphere around her house. The poet refers to this fragrance and points out how eagerly he has been looking for this fragrance almost everywhere – in land, in water, in clouds, in 'miles and miles of sky', far and near, in mornings and evenings, and finally, gets it in himself, in his deepest mind. Similarly in another poem, entitled *Draupadira Sādhi* (The Saree of Draupadi), which the poet subtitles as a 'study about sexual behavior', the action leading to Draupadi's 'nakedness' at the Kuru court and the fiasco, has been taken up as a symbol to suggest sexual action and sexual behaviours as being perpetually present in life irrespective of time and place ("from eternal times/In innumerable bodies/In emptiness/And in points of time"), and how in final reckoning sex and death have always gone together– "That's

a declaration of love/Whether in the fields of Troy/Or on the sands of Nile/Or In Hastina in flaming camps/Or on the banks of rivers of blood/ Of millions of soldiers/One vision/Death comes along with sex."

Probably the poet who has made the readers most aware of the Mahabharat in the recent times is Sitakant Mahapatra (born 1937). He has composed a number of poems related to the Mahabharat situations and suggestions, along with a whole book entitled **Astapadi** (Eight Steps), consisting of 8 long poems, related in theme and approach, where myth in general, and the Mahabharat in particular, provides the main structural elements as well as poetic motifs. The relatively more important poems are, *Ajnāntabāsa* (The Concealed Stay), *Abhimanyu, Yudhisthira, Duryodhana, Sarasajyā* (The Bed of Arrows), *Krushna Kaibarta* (Krishna the Boatman), *Srikrushnank Mrutyu* (The Death of Krishna), *Jara Sabarar Sangita* (The Song of Jara, the Hunter), *Basara Darpanare Suryasta* (The Sunset in the Mirror of the Bus) and *Duiti Janana* (Two Prayers). The poems have dense structure, and the Mahabharat references have added extra dimensions to otherwise complex individual attitudes and insights. Thus the two companion poems, *Jara Sabarar Sangita* and *Srikrushnanka Mrutu,* which relate to one situation, that is, Krishna's death, have apparently two different attitudes. In the former which is in the form of Jara's soliloquy, there are references to innumerable pretences of life where divine knowledge is denied to man who is ultimately reduced to great sorrow and loneliness. But in the latter, it is a matter of common death, however important that may be, of a man about whose credentials many had doubts, though all agreed to consider his death as an occasion of great sorrow. But in both the poems there is basically a movement away from pretences and commonness towards a baffling, incomprehensible sensation which cannot be accounted for within the familiar terms of life, such as, sorrow and death.

Similarly of the two character–poems *Duryodhana* and *Yudhisthira*, the former is a re-counting of Duryodhana as a proud, sensitive man, eager for love and understanding, and basically the representative of a protest against the operation of a blind destiny. But the latter is a more complex poem. Apart from its first reference to the Mahabharat it is connected with what the poet saw in 'Kanal', a modern Polish film,

which narrates how, during the Second World War, when the Nazi soldiers attacked Warsaw, the Polish capital, five persons, among whom was a flute–player, tried to escape through a sewage tunnel, but finally, coming out of it, got killed. The common references are, on the one hand, to war, death and devastation, corpses and blood, and intolerable stench ; and on the other, the rhythms of the flute played by the flute-player inside the sewage stink, and the memory of Yudhisthira of that most melodious flute which he had heard being played on the banks of Jamuna, and in Dwaraka. At the deepest level, hopes emerge – hopes of life over stench, waste and death, as the fugitives grope through the darkness of sewer, or as Yudhisthira gropes through darkness and devastation after the great war : "And then you Yudhisthira/ (Of our age)/ You may arrive as you are/At the entrance of a new heaven/Across the scattered remnants of consciousness and time".

Similar meditations on life and death may also be noted in *Abhimanyu*. Abhimanyu as a bright, youngman who died untimely under adult conspiracy, has always fascinated the imagination of poets, and it has been seen how the senior poet Panigrahi took him up as the symbol of a restless human quest for freedom and from bondage, which was more or less the symbol of the times when it was written, that is, late twenties and early thirties. In Mahapatra the perception is deeper and relates to a fundamental understanding about life. Thus the coils of the Circle–Labyrinth in which Abhimanyu was caught, are like many coils of life in which all of us are caught, as 'birds are caught in the net of a hunter', and 'all' includes all roads, all mountains and houses, all times and all echoes and re-echoes. No one can escape from it: "Get into any room/And you can't get out of it/It opens to another room/And to another/ And yet to another/All same/All empty". The hope (and also the strength) lies not in feeling restless but in submitting, as Abhimanyu did at the end, quietly and happily, at the inevitability of the 'net' :

> Therefore, today, I am free,
> As I have crossed my roads
> And all my adolescent desires and dreams.
> Let your net be eternal
> And this illusion.
> And let your labyrinth remain

Strong as ever
Oh, Hunter !

Ajantabasa (that is, the hiding) of the Pandavas at king Virat's place, which is related to an important episode of the Mahabharat, has also been taken up by Mahapatra as a symbol suggesting two levels – first of all, as a happy, comfortable escape from the lies and conflicts of the past, and secondly, at a deeper level, as a movement from one set of lies to another set of lies and from one type of darkness to another. Thus the 'concealed stay' brings no change, it continues the same pretences of life. *Basara Darpanare Suryasta,* an early poem of Mahapatra, shows the merging of a day-to-day familiar situation with a mysterious, incomprehensible situation taken from the Mahabharat. The first situation refers to the familiar reflection in the mirror of a moving bus, of the moving landscape, seen against a sunset–sky, which finally transcends to a flaming, burning universal vision as seen by Arjuna in the battle field : "All lost/All gone/Innumerable universes/All gone/All sucked by the primordial being/The rays of the setting sun took all./The flaming ball in the mirror of the bus/Is it heaven ?/Or beyond heaven?".

The interest about the Mahabharat which Mahapatra's efforts generated among Oriya poets, is probably most consistently seen in Saurindra Barik (born 1938), a fine modern poet, whose first book of poetry came out in the seventies. He has written about 70 poems dealing variously with the Mahabharat situations. These are mostly character–studies seen from the modern man's point of view, and accepting the Mahabharat accounts as so many realistic accounts full of pain, agony and suffering. The characters include well-known persons such as Bhisma, Duryodhana, Arjuna, Karna, Draupadi, Kunti, Satyabati etc., and less well–known people such as Ullupi, Amba, Bellalsen etc. But everywhere the conventional Mahabharat situations have been enlivened with a new understanding and a new dimension, as a result of which the old, familiar characters come out as belonging to our time and sharing our feelings of hope and uncertainty about life. Thus there are 13 poems that relate to varying emotions as well as psychological moods of Draupadi, such as, her sorrow at being denied one husband, or her suffering at being compelled to live under certain discipline to

accommodate five husbands to establish a righteous way of life, when her desires as a woman who wants to love and get love in return are completely ignored; or her irritation to depend upon the support of an outsider like Krishna at the time of crisis. For example, her desire at the end, when she falls a prey to the icy-coolness of Himavant, is both pitiable and sorrowful :

From the flaming emptiness of sacrificial fire
To the icy-coolness of Himavant,
What do I look for? What ?
Is it heaven? –
Oh my husbands, my five husbands,
I do not call for God,
I call you–my last call –
Forget your truth, Dharma,
Take me to your lap
And let me die there happily, peacefully.

Similarly the poems about Arjuna portray the great hero's feelings ranging from anger and irritation to dismay and loneliness, and point out the underlying paradox in his situation. Thus as the best friend of Krishna he is almost over-shadowed by the latter and whatever he does is only at the bidding of the latter. This makes Arjuna sad, and he is eager to be released from Krishna's grip and assert his own personality. Hence before the battle he not only lays down his weapons but is anxious to move away from the so called 'grip' of dharma into "new light, new life, new brightness and new death." Also after seeing the Universal Vision he is not only tired, he is also irritated at realizing what it means, that it takes away all his independent capacity to act–"Now I understand/ I understand all/I am nothing/No body is anything/Gandiva is nothing/ It's all an echo/Reflections of your wishes/We act out only your emptiness." Therefore he is anxious that he should be released from Krishna's grip and be left alone with his suffering :

This is the only prayer, Oh Lord,
Permit me to be Arjuna,
Permit me to dance alone,
Permit me to walk alone with my load,
Alone, alone,

All alone.

In Duryodhan, Karn a, Bhisma, Kunti, everywhere, the poet, while working on the traditional associations of the Mahabharat invariably moves away to areas of subtle moods and feelings. Thus Bhisma in his bed of arrows, remembers nostalgically Debabrata, his own earlier self, and how erratically he ignored the call of youth. Or Duryodhana at the end realises that all his travels, throughout his life, were towards emptiness, and life as a whole is a vast emptiness, and people die only to die once again. Yudhisthir also comes to a similar realization at the end, when while looking at the great Himavant and recollecting his own long life, hazy with memory, he becomes conscious of a great emptiness in the sky, and a great thirst in himself. And then,

Then no mountains, no pilgrims, no journey
No mist, no storm, no blueness
No light or darkness
No beginning or end,
As if it is the end of all ends,
Emptiness of all emptiness.

I have exclusively discussed poetry so far, because it is almost exclusively in poetry that Oriya literature has showed its most sensitive reaction to the Mahabharat. But a recent novel may be discussed in this connection. It is entitled **Jajnaseni** by Smt. Pratibha Ray, probably the most popular novelist today in Orissa, and the book has also achieved record sale and popularity. In about 450 pages it is a comprehensive account of Draupadi as she sees herself with relation to various Mahabharat incidents and characters, and particularly with relation to Krishna, her 'dearest friend'. In fact Draupadi's relationship with Krishna provides the main motive force in the novel. Though nothing physical, yet the strong invisible bond between the two almost assumes the structure of a physical intimacy. Thus the whole novel, which is in the form of Draupadi's recollection at the end, when she falls a victim at Himavant, is addressed to Krishna to whom she communicates her hopes and desires as well as distress and dismay, not as the great queen of the Pandavas who was instrumental in establishing dharma in Bharat, but very much as a woman of flesh and blood who all along carried an immense emptiness in herself occasioned by her tortuous and suffering

life. Incidentally, Draupadi raises protest against male chauvinism, declares that all war is futile, and finally rejects heaven in favour of this human world, however temporary and limited it may be. **Jajnaseni** is an interesting work, and shows a strong, intelligent, contemporary feminine altitude towards the great, ancient epic.

Dr. S. V. Sukthankar while discussing on the meaning of the Mahabharat in 1942, spoke of three dimensions in it - mundane, ethical and metaphysical. Later, Dr. Iravati Karve and poet Budhadev Bose discussed the Mahabharat as a great secular document of life and interpreted it from the modern man's point of view. But probably Sri Aurobindo goes to its essence when he speaks of it as 'highly artistic representation of intimate significance of life'. That is how the modern writers look at the Mahabharat, as providing innumerable significances of the fundamental problems of life.

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5

WORSHIP OF MOTHER GODDESS – SARALA AND RADHANATH : A COMPARATIVE REFERENCE

Sarala Das lived and wrote in the 15th century. Radhanath Roy lived from 1848 to 1908, and most of his major kavyas were written in the last two decades of the 19th century. Thus a period of about 400 years intervened between Sarala's and Radhanath's poetry – a period of great stress and strain for Orissa during which she lost her independence (1568) and came to be ruled successively by the Moghuls, the Muslims, the Marathas and the British. The change in time along with political changes brought in considerable socio–cultural changes as well as changes in attitudes which may be easily noted even in a cursory assessment of the poetry of these two important writers. But one similarity which can even surprise the casual reader is exhibited in their references to the worship of mother goddess, that is, Durga, Kali, Mahamaya etc., again and again in their poetical works. This is an interesting similarity, and testifies to the strength of the Sakti–tradition in Orissa, which in spite of being an ancient tradition (the present image of Biraja at Jajpur, north east of Cuttack, belonged to 5th century A.D and the worship predates that time) that flourished from about 6th century to 12th century A. D., during the times of such dynasties as Sailodbhavas, Bhaumakaras and Somavansis, had to some extent declined due to lack of royal patronage with the coming of the Vaishnavite Gangas and after that. But the fact remains that the worship never declined in spite of the vicissitudes of religion and politics and it only spread out in innumerable steams, in innumerable local traditions all over Orissa and continued to grip the common mind with equal strength and devotion. Hence the interesting similarity between Sarala and Radhanath, though they were separated by about four centuries.

Sarala Das wrote a book on mother–goddess and entitled it as **Chandi Purana** (a definitive edition was edited by Dr. K.C. Sahoo, and published in 1984). By the poet's own admission this was his third book, the

other two being **Vichitra Ramayana** and **Mahabharat**. The scholars maintain that **Chandi Purana** is 'Devi Bhagabat' and find out kinship between Sri Durga and Vishnu. But the book as a whole is a fine account of the exploits of Mahisasura and his ultimate defeat in the hands of Sri Chandi. The drums of war reverberate from the beginning to the end of the book and all details about war and warfare, and invasion and attack, are seen again and again till in the final holocaust Mahisasura is killed and torn into pieces. Dr. Sahoo points out how **Chandi Purana** written towards the end of the 15th century when Hindu states all over India were falling a prey to the Muslim invaders, reflects the contemporary socio–political crisis and instability. The lust, greed and vandalism of the invaders have been allegorically focussed through the lust and greed of the forces of Mahisasura. But what is probably more important is the way the poet established the strength of feminine power at a time when in the society women were universally ignored and insulted, and more particularly in the ultimate fight between the good and the evil, it is the women who symbolize the triumphant power of the forces of light against the forces of darkness. Thus the worship of mother–goddess is not just a worship. It is the establishment of the power symbolized in the female form, the source of fertility and life, that rises at the time of crisis and brings the wrong doers to book. At one level **Chandi Purana** is a narrative account, the product of its time; at another, it is an idea and a vision–the insight of a seer who could assess and analyse the elements of disintegration, towards realizing a wholesome and becoming life.

In fact references to mother-goddess in Sarala's poetry are innumerable. Some of the names may be listed here, such as, Bhagabati, Tripura, Ugratārā, Māheswari, Sāralā, Nārāyani, Hingulāi, Bāsanti., Bhairavi, Tārini, Ambikā, Chāmundā, Shibāni, Churchikā. Birajā, Kāmākhi, Mangalā and Sarbamangala etc., though the poet has not been always particular in giving their places of worship. Besides, there are devotional hymns both in his **Mahabharat** as well as separately, in *Saralā-mālasri*, a poem. In fact the great epic begins with a prayer to Goddess Sarala where her place of worship and the times are pointed out along with the powers of the Goddess:

Towards the north of the blue, beautiful hill,
On the east of the great land of Bharat,
Along the singular river Chandrabhaga
That flows into the sea as the old Mother Ganga,
And the bank called Parasurama Ghata,
And the place called Kanakabati Patna,
And the adjoining village called Sarola-
She sits – the Maheswari,
Called Sarola Chandi –
The great ascetic, the Vaishnavi,
The holiest woman who liberally
bestows boons to all.

In *Sarala–malasri* the prayer to the Goddess has been made in general terms where the poet meditates on the great beauty and power of the Goddess :

Your are the great Yogini and incarnation
of great wisdom,
You ride across the sky on great tigers
and lions,
Your eyes bloom as flowers and your feet
radiant like fresh lotus,
Your body as blue as the clouds...

The references to mother-goddess in Sarala Das's poetry are full of passionate intensity and they have brought in an atmosphere of immense beauty and tranquillity.

In Radhanath's poetry, too, the references to mother–goddess are equally frequent and prominent. These can be seen at two levels. First of all, like Sarala, Radhanath has also listed the goddesses, but with a difference, that is, in each case, he pin–points the place, points out its specific nature and refers to particular power or beauty of the goddess, as a result of which, almost involuntarily, the reader is led to know many parts of Orissa, and its famous hills, rivers and forests which have in course of time grown up in traditions of worship. Thus in **Chandrabhāgā** (published 1886) the kavya begins with an account of goddesses who have assembled at Lord Jagannath's temple at Sri Nilachala (Puri) on the occasion of a festival. They are, 1) Harachandi,

from 'marshy beaches' of Chilika, 2) Bhagabati, from Banapur, where 'Solari hills' see their faces on the 'mirror-like water of the lake', 3) Bhubaneswari, from Bhubaneswar, where 'golden hills' stand and thousands of 'flowers bloom in Ekamra garden', 4) Manināg Durgā, from Ranapur, where she is worshipped at the 'top of the Maninag hills', with 'blood red flowers', 5) Churchikā, from Banki, where 'sailors' worship the goddess, 6) Barunei, from Khurda, where 'innumerable streams' from Barunei hills 'wash the feet of the goddess', 7) Chandikā, from Debidwar, where the great river Mahanadi flows through the hills, 8) Chandi, from Cuttack, wearing 'white flowers in her dark tresses' like a 'smart lady of the town',9) Sāralā, from Jhankada, who 'rides on a lion and always brings succour to her devotees', 10) Mangalā, from Kakatpur, which is 'infested with bears' and 11) Kālijāi, the goddess from the lonely hillock in Chilika, where 'hills have risen from inside the blue waters' and where 'in moonlit nights the lonely sailors get startled at hearing the unearthly fairy songs floating across the waves'.

Chandrabhaga is not a lone example. In other kavyas of Radhanath too, such as **Nandikeswari**, **Ushā**, **Pārbati**, **Chilikā**, **Jajātikeshari** etc. one comes across these references again and again. Apart from highlighting many beautiful places of Orissa, they testify the strength and spread of mother–goddess worship in the land, in coastal areas as well as in the north and western mountainous forest–tracts. But the second level of references is interesting. Unlike Sarala who used the story of Chandi and Mahisasura as an allegory to comment on the contemporary socio–political conditions, Radhanath used references to mother–goddess to promote the sequences of his story, and to finally bring the necessary resolutions in each case. This is particularly seen in two kavyas, **Usha** (published 1888) and **Jajatikeshari** (published 1895). When at the end of the story in **Usha** the situation becomes suddenly tragic, and all, including the king, were drowned in great sorrow, the goddess Kali, the presiding deity of the kingdom, appeared to the king in dream, and explained the strange co-ordination of events :

> The king, while unconscious, saw the strange dream -
> Kali appeared in front – dark, as dark clouds,
> The garland of skulls hung from her neck
> Like cranes against the cloud's darkness,

And the sword shone in her hands like lightening.

In fact the goddess's explanation and advice consoled the king and the people, and the tragic happenings were accepted as works of destiny, and the events were brought to their normal conclusion when the young couple, though dead, were coronated with all honour and a pavillion was built to commemorate their memory.

In **Usha** the goddess was Kali or Shyama, and she was worshipped on the bank of Balangi, at Nurupur, which was a part of present Baleswar town. In **Jajatikeshari** the goddess was Sri Biraja of present Jaipur town. As in **Usha** so also in **Jajatikeshari** the goddess interferes at a point towards the end of the story when the events were going to be tragic after a clandestine love–affair between the young princess and the prince. The young prince has been captured from inside the palace and he has been ordered to fight it out with seven warriors in the public arena. But the fight did not take place. The presiding deity, goddess Biraja, appeared to the king in dream and explained the situation, and the divine protection enjoyed by the young prince, and advised the king to accept the prince as his son–in–law and formalize the marriage between him and the princess, because that is the destiny divinely ordained for the future of the kingdom. The goddess as she appeared in dream, brought feelings of great grace and happiness to the king.

The halcyon rays from the Mother's lips
cut through all my sins,
And made my heart clear and sparkling
like the river in Bhadra ;
That divine fragrance even the creator
would not have smelt in his dreams,
And Her words exceeded and drowned
all the lines of music.

The story ended in happiness. The difference from **Usha** is that whereas in the former the goddess's interference brought courage and consolation to sorrowing people, in the latter it averted a tragic situation and brought hope and happiness for the future in the king and the people. But in both, the goddesses symbolize the forces of inexorable destiny to which human beings have to bow ultimately. In Radhanath the mother–goddess is humanized and yet she stands apart guiding the course of

events.

As I said earlier, the tradition of worship of mother–goddess is very ancient in Orissa, and in art and architecture, as well as in literature, we had evidences of it in many forms. Both Sarala and Radhanath while conforming to the tradition, acted as per the conditions of their own times. But what is to be noted in both cases, is the power of the creative mind at work, which could transform the simple references to works of imagination and power, as a result of which new dimensions could be added to an otherwise simple tradition of worship and devotion.

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6

ORIYA LITERARY HERITAGE : A STUDY OF RELIGIOUS PERCEPTION

The ancient Oriya literature, particularly ancient Oriya poetry, is rich and varied. Beginning from early 15th century, for about 500 years, till the end of the 19th century, Oriya literature was largely a growth in poetry. By an estimate there used to be more than 700 poets during this period who lived and wrote varieties of poems and kavyas, almost always in musical structure and in a language and style ranging from contemporary local speech to learned, sophisticated language, and from simple narration to complicated turns of thought and imagination. The poets wrote in varieties of form and exhibited varieties of emotion, not only in the time's scale, differing as the times differed, but also in any particular time and period within the limitations of time and place. Yet, looking at it as a whole, one is amazed at the consistency and congruity, the extent to which certain trends and perceptions have provided relevance and credibility to the totality of sensibility and understanding. One such perception relates to poems of prayer and meditation and their immense structural flexibility, depending upon the occasions and individuals.

Such poems were written by almost all ancient Oriya poets and it would be really exciting to trace how they developed through time. First of all, it was in the nature of direct prayer – prayer to gods and goddesses of Hindu pantheon, particularly the more important ones. These have been written, invariably in a worshipful mood, praising the great powers of the God or the Goddess as well as the great grace of divine beauty. The devotee always expresses his obeisance and submission, and hopes to attain the purity of mind and salvation of spirit through his devotion. Yet, in this apparently simple structure there are variations, and the emotions range from simple joy and happiness at the thought of the God, to the feelings of pride and dignity because of the God's intransigence. Differently, there is also wit, and a desire to mock at the God's peculiar habits. The gods and goddesses thus

worshipped, had their many local names as well as Rama, Krishna and Lord Jagannath. Lord Jagannath particularly, being the national deity of the Oriyas, has evoked a vast amount of such prayerful poems and songs from almost every poet.

It begins from the beginning, one can say, from Sarala Das, the great epic-poet of the 15th century. By the poet's own admission he wrote his **Mahabharat** under instruction from Goddess Sarala :

The Great Goddess by name Sri Sarala Chandi
I am her son, Sarala Das, the poet,
She instructed me, the white–complexioned Goddess,
Compose the Mahabharat, and attain the Kapilas.

Thus, the poet's first prayer is to Goddess Sarala, which he has also put in at many other places of his great work. In fact the **Mahabharat** begins with a prayer to the Goddess where the poet refers to the Goddess's local habitation, and narrates her great beauty and power :

Towards the north of the blue, beautiful hill,
On the east of the great land of Bharat
Along the singular river Chandrabhaga
That flows into the sea as the old Mother Ganga,
And the bank called Parasurama Ghata,
And the place called Kanakabati Patna,
And the adjoining village called Sarola –
She sits, the Maheswari,
Called Sarola Chandi –
The great ascetic, the great Vaishnabi,
The holiest woman who liberally
bestows boons to all,
Who fulfills everybody's desires,
And whose benedictions blossom
like flowers from stone..

Elsewhere in *Sarala Malasri* a similar meditation on the Goddess's beauty and power continues:

You are the great Yogini and incarnation of great wisdom.
You ride across the sky on great tigers and lions,
Your eyes bloom as flowers
Your feet radiant like fresh lotus,
Your body as blue as the clouds,

You are the most beautiful, most enchanting,
You are in one body and spread to many bodies
You are here, and spread to the whole sky....

Similarly, prayer to Lord Siva refers to Lord's place, that is Kasi Varanasi, and to his power, beauty as well as playfulness :

You are the Creation and the Deluge
You destroy all
O Lord of three worlds,
You move on a bull
Always out of mind,
You are the great mendicant
The great Destroyer....
One leg, four hands, three eyes, five faces
You are the Lord of the Universe
Lover of Ganga....
Your beautiful forehead glows with scarlet
Your clothes are purple like red vermillion
And red *mandar* flowers hang from your neck,
You dance all forgotten, across time,
Uniquely, extraordinarily,
You ride on the bull, oh Lord,
And your powers are immense, immeasurable.
Always imbalanced, always tipsy
Nothing touches you, O Lord,
Always worried about others.

Balaram Das, the 16th century epic-poet who wrote **Ramayana**, also composed many poems of devotion, including *Devi Malasri*, a short, musical piece as a prayer to Goddess Durga, highlighting the Goddess's preference to colour, particularly red colour:

Oh, Mother,
Red are your weapons, your clothes
Red your lips and eyes
Nails and face,
The red vermillion on your forehead
And red dye on your feet...

The poet has also a few poems of prayer for Lord Jagannath, where he asks only for the God's blessings :

O you, the friend of the poor,
My sorrows never leave me,
If you forget me so, being such a friend,
Who else will befriend me ?...
He is the poor's friend, the great Mendicant,
He destroys the sorrows of yogis
And brings happiness to the poor...
O save me, Round-Eyed.
I drown,
Save me from this sea of life....

Balaram's famous contemporary Jagannath Das who wrote **Bhāgabat**, probably the most popular book in Orissa so far, has interspersed prayers to Lord Jagannath in many places of his great work, almost always marvelling at the immense powers of the Lord, and the unique protection he offers to his devotees. Thus a piece entitled 'I bow to thee. Lord Jagannath' runs as follows :

I bow to Thee, O Lord Jagannath,
The protector of people who have no protection ;
I bow to thee,. O Lord Vasudeva,
The friend to all devotees ;
I bow to thee, O Lord Hrusikesha,
The confidant of all who believe in you ;
I bow to thee, O Lord of the Universe.
You are in all hearts
You create all the worlds
Again you swallow them all.
These fourteen worlds are yours
You have created them all.
You are the Brahma, Rudra, Vishnu,
There is no other salvation
Except in you.

As has been said earlier, the habit of expressing devotion to gods and goddesses is almost continuous in ancient Oriya poetry. The trend thus begun with Sarala, Balaram and Jagannath continued with their contemporaries as well as with their juniors, till the end of the 19th century. Though most of these poems were uni-dimensional, that is, had the overpowering desire of devotion and submission, yet they had

other related feelings too. Thus at an apparent level the divine power is admitted along with an account of the great beauty of the gods and goddesses. But what is implied is the immense joy and excitement of the devotee along with a subtle sense of pride that the devotee has also an identity independent of his god or goddess, which might have been a gift of the god, but which the god should admit and respect. We have noted how Sarala's intense prayer to the Goddess was direct and straightforward. So also was the case with Balaram who describes the Devi's beauty or bows to Lord Jagannath. But in Achyutananda, the 16th century poet who wrote **Haribansa**, there is a touch of pride, as if the poet is hurt at the Lord's intransigence:

Will there be no good, O Lord,
Even though you are with me so merciful !
Is it your desire that
Even if I worship your lotus-feet
I will be destroyed !
Oh, you love your devotees so well –
But If a slave gets killed
Why should people worship you !
Tell me,
Why should they call you *Madhusudan*.

Probably the most well-known poet in this respect, whose songs of prayer have become justly famous for their fine compositional as well as musical values, has been Salbeg, a 17th century Muslim poet (father Muslim, mother a Hindu Brahmin widow). His songs are mostly submissions to Lord Jagannath which have on the one hand a simple joy, and on the other, a simple intensity, for which they have been easily appreciated by the devotees. Thus the God is praised for his great beauty:

Look at him from behind Garuda
See how the lotus–face glows with beauty,
The diamonds and gems burn like fire
And the diamond-chain hangs from his neck -
He is prayed to provide succor to his devotees.
Oh, you Great Rogue of the Blue Hills
Trample my sorrows under your feet
As you trample a forest of lotus.
You live only for your devotee

You bear the signs of Conch and Discus only for him,
He is your father, mother
He is your friend,
For his good alone
You bear the name Krupasindhu, **The Sea of Mercy.**

Therefore the devotee's prayer to Him is not for this or that, any material gain or wealth:

On, Lord, I don't ask for anything,
I am not asking for men
Nor I ask for wealth
What I ask for is a cubic foot
from the sand you love.
My eyes don't long for anything else
Except to see you,
My ears don't receive any other sound
Except that which tells of you.

Dinakrushna Das, the famous poet of late 17th and early 18th century, begins his great kavya **Rasakallol** (The Waves of Rasa) with a prayer to Lord Jagannath that describes the Lord's great beauty and charm and points out the immense joy and happiness they bring to the devotee:

The lotus–face brings immense happiness
And the dark retina is like a bee sucking,
The golden pendant flashes in the forehead
And who does not tremble with happiness at the sight ?
Who can describe the glory of red lips ?
The poet becomes dumb on seeing that.

But the Lord has his own playfulness too, and the devotee feels hurt at the Lord's apparent unconcern Thus he tries to reason out in a bid to expose Lord's failings, as elsewhere, in the poet's famous *Artatran Janana* (The Prayer to Alleviate Suffering):

Oh Lord,
Being yourself the Lord of the Sea of Mercy
How you couldn't have pity
on a luckless man?
Oh tell me, tell me why it happens?
You understand all, oh Bhabagrahi,

I feel so strange...
He who has all wealth
Who is served by the Goddess of Wealth,
On seeing whose face all sorrows vanish -
How is it, being his slave,
I am a beggar, Oh Lord.
Oh hearing this
People of the fourteen worlds will be amazed,
It's not a fiction, Oh Lord,
Oh great Lord of the Blue Hills.

Kavisurya Baladev Rath, another major poet of later 18th and early 19th century, and who excelled in writing love poems as well as very entertaining satirical pieces, had also some fine poems of prayer. Thus in one of the poems, entitled *Malasri*, the poet prays to Goddess Durga, who is both – awe–inspiring as well as the source of bliss and benediction, and who also in a great fight destroyed Evil and brought solace to the gods. The poem is a fine example of apt co-ordination between sense and sound. Another piece, entitled *Jagannath Janana* (Prayer to Lord Jagannath) is a direct submission of the devotee to the Lord. But at the same time it has an implicit bantering tone which brings the submission to a larger focus and sharpness, as in the first stanza :

You are the life's friend
Of the Princess of the Sea of Milk,
You are the Lord of the Universe,
And you have raised the banner
of equal treatment,
Yet, Oh God, Why
Why this partiality ?
Somebody did something
Which I didn't do,
Or somebody gave away something
Which I didn't give,
Is that the reason, Oh Lord,
Is that why I am put to such strain ?

The poet developed this bantering, witty submission in a famous poem of his, entitled *Sarpa Janana* (Prayer to the Snake), which is a prayer not to Lord Jagannath alone but to a combination of Jagannath, Vishnu

and Krishna. The God is conceived here as a snake, that drinks wind, and he is reputed to be such a person who could destroy his own house and could kill his own kith and kin :

> Does it hurt you, O lover of Rama?
> Then please, excuse me,
> Or please, wait a while,
> I will today scold you to my heart's fill,
> Oh Lord, Oh Lord of Mercy, Oh Jagannath,
> The wise men are afraid of you
> And call you Sea of Mercy,
> You are in fact the Great Snake of Time
> And you swallow all
> All souls, like wind,
> Oh God of Mercy !

The poet is angry and hurt, but the anger sublimates in complete surrender at the end - "Oh, Sea of Mercy, I am your slave/Know this, and consider..."

As I said, the poems of prayer were many, an almost continuous preoccupation with ancient Oriya poets, to the extent that very minor poets, who were otherwise unknown, became famous by one or two songs of prayer. Such a person was Chandan Hajuri (18th century) whose single poem addressed to Lord Jagannath is one of the most popular jananas in Oriya. In fact, in spite of variations and tension which implicit emotions provide, these poems are characterized by a sense of strong devotion and submission to the respective gods and goddesses, and they uphold the invisible yet intense link between the devotee and his God in a worshipful mood and in a mental condition of joy and happiness.

(ii)

The second trend is different in approach and motivation. The poets are not much interested in particular god or goddess and hence what is lacking is a worshipful mood that grows along with specific worships and rituals. The approach is one of meditation, meditating on that which cannot be easily comprehended, and yet to be comprehended to establish the link between the devotee and the divine being and to foster a condition

of complete joy and tranquillity. We have noted the former group as 'janana' or prayers to the Lord. The present group may be called 'bhajana', apparently to chant the Lord's name, but basically, to meditate upon that subtle divine concept that almost passes understanding.

As is said, the occasion is not to pray to any particular god or goddess. The occasion is an experience of an undefined power, which the poets have variously called as *brahma* or *sunnya*. Such poems of prayer have symbolic suggestions, and their structures have elements of thought and intellect. This trend, as the earlier one, has been almost continuous in the ancient Oriya poetry and as powerful, though some periods may be said to have louder expressions of this experience than found in other times. The sixteenth century was such a period when a powerful concentration of such poetry could be seen in the poems of such poets as Acyhutananda, Jasobanta and Sisu Ananta. Subsequently, to name a few others, the trend continued in such other poets as Nathia Lokanath (17th century), Arta Das (18th century), and Bahuda and Bhima Bhoi in the 19th. The emotion is controlled by thought, and the poet's main spiritual experience is expressed through a structure of arguments, and through images related to the body and different parts of the body. What the poet finds in the confines of the human body is only a step to move further, to a point where the body does not exist, and even beyond, to situations where nothing exists, and finally to an awareness where even 'nothingness' does not exist.

Achyutananda's poem *Asunnya Hoina* (Be in Asunnya) is an apt example of this complex spiritual experience. The poem begins with a reference to *asunnya* which can be defined as 'negative emptiness', that is, where even 'emptiness' (*sunnya*) does not exist:

A place was there
It was asunnya,
Strange to say
Then sunnya was formed,
And inside the sunnya
Existed the formless,
And from the body of the formless
Grew the image of absolute being,
And from the absolute being
Quivered the sound,

And the sound awoke
Along with four arts.

It is progression of experience to concrete details. But finally the experience goes back from where it began:

The wind turned
Blew upstream,
And the spirit moved
Back to the shining orb,
Back to the white mark
Where the attention was fixed.
As the mind was merged
The emptiness was revealed,
As the emptiness was formed
The negative emptiness awoke.

This habit of linking spiritual experiences with thought and intelligence can also be seen in another poem of Achyutananda, entitled *Baimana Re* (Oh My Mad Mind). The poem has a number of incongruous and apparently opposite elements:

The new-moon night has the moon with sixteen parts,
And the moon rises every night, every day,
The lamp burns day and night
And the forty nine winds blow
and kindle the lamp.

Or,

The swan swims in the stream's gorge
The deer sleeps on fathomless water,
The four clouds joined and poured
And poured incessantly,
And the crops dried up in the complete drought.

Apparently these are opposed to each other, that is, the new–moon night and the moon, the stormy wind and the burning lamp, and so also the rain and the drought cannot exist together. Therefore to see them together is an absurd idea. But this is only one way of looking at the situation. There is another way, and whatever appear to us as incongruous, in fact get joined up at a deeper level, and the poem's orientation is to move from incongruous and incompatible towards a realization of congruity and compatibility. Thus the poet's initial advice,

Oh, my crazy mind
Spell whatever cannot be spelt,

has been transformed into a higher and deeper spiritual understanding :

The temple has risen in emptiness
The temple stands on water -
What a temple the sculptor has carved !
It has no doors,
And yet you can see the Lord.

. But Achyutananda was not a lone figure in this respect, though he was one of the most important. In fact his poetic attitude was influenced by the inherent attitudes of the Bhakti literature of contemporary Orissa. As has been noted, similar attitudes can be seen in the poetry of Achyutananda's contemporaries, such as Jasobanta and Sisu Ananta. Jasobanta's poem, for example *T'hula Sunnya Nahin* (No Fixed Emptiness), has developed over a number of negative points:

He hasn't any fixed emptiness
He shines in nameless,
He hasn't any leg or hand
He exists in undefined,
He has no body
He lives in bodilessness,
He is not worshipped
He never does any work
He has no habit
He is invisible....

This is one level. One may define it as a 'physical' condition, which is expressed in the apparent meaning of word and sound, and in a way confined to that meaning. But differently with respect to implicit suggestiveness, this is not just a negative formulation. This is a complex spiritual awareness that has no body or shape, not in portions, and which cannot be expressed in language. Hence the awareness is one of affirmation, and the spiritual elements end in a subtle mystic perception – "He shines in nameless".... "He is fixed and shapeless".... "No movement/Neither wind, nor sun nor moon" "It is not spoken/It is unspoken, unnumberable" etc.

A similar perception can be noted in Sisu Ananta too. For example in a poem such as *Abanā Akhyara Japa* (Meditate on the Unspelt Word)

mystic feelings have been expressed not through any relative complications of emotions, but through the discipline of yogic exercises:

> The lips and teeth shouldn't move
> The throat and head shouldn't shiver
> No rituals, no hymns, no worship
> And perceive the absolute being...

and at the supreme stage of experience the perception of Ultimate Beauty is not something fleeting, it is real, and seen through the symbols of Radha and Krishna:

> Look at the lotus of thousand petals
> It is Kanaha, the son of Nanda,
> On his left is the daughter of King Bhanu
> And she glitters like lightening.

For about 300 years the spiritual experiences of Achyutananda, Jasobanta and Sisu Ananta flowed as a strong under–current in ancient Oriya poetry and continued to sustain and fertilize it. Innumerable poets drew inspiration from Achyutananda etc. and shaped their attitudes and motivations accordingly. But it was not until the later part of the 19th century that the whole trend surfaced once again, and that too, in the poetry of a powerful poet (incidentally, a blind, tribal poet) Bhima Bhoi. In Bhoi's poetry an intense spiritual experience has joined with an extremely subtle mystical perception, and both have sublimated in the visualization of a 'shapeless' Absolute Being.

Some of the titles of Bhoi's poems are revealing. They are, for example, in English translation, 'The Unspelt Wind Blows', 'Relax in the Empty Temple', 'No Legs no Hands', 'No Shape no Form', 'Shapeless Formless', 'Lives in Empty Shape', 'Rise to Empty Summit' and 'Formless Emptiness' etc. First of all, whatever is apparently impossible and unnatural, is seen in the organisation of experiences:

> There is a shade, but no tree
> There are fruits, but no flowers and buds
> There are leaves, but no stems...
>
> (*Rupa Rekha Nahin*)

Or,

> There is no cultivator
> Yet cultivation goes on,
> There is no house

Yet bamboos are arranged,
There are no sellers
Yet the market is held,
Nothing is being sold
Yet the bargain continues...

(*Sunnya Swarupa Basi*)

Secondly, there is a feeling of something illimitable, that is, that which is not possible within the physical bounds:

The unidentified wind blows day and night as one,
Who has known it, where?
Who has understood the beginning
and the end?
In the deep space
On the way of emptiness,
The shapeless meets the colourless,
They go through bodies
And universes,
Yet no body can catch them.

(*Bahuchhi Abana Bai*)

Or,

He has no legs no hands
Who will catch him?
You never see such being anywhere
Such Absolute Being.

(*Pada Pani Nahin*)

Or,

He has no form
An empty body
And he has risen...

(*Rupa Rekha Nahin*)

Thirdly, it is a disturbing awareness of that great grace and beauty possessed by illimitable, but expressed in the familiar symbols of common beauty and related to the development of familiar consciousness:

Beautiful in a dark colour,
Words as sweet as the flow of nectar,
See O' wise men,
The lustre of absolute being around you

And the body is worn
With millions of luminosities.

(*Shyāmala Rupabarna Sundar*)

and,

Rise to the summit of emptiness
See him, the unwritten, in his palace,
Serve him
He is the deliverance,
He shines like lightening,
Body burns in radiance
Perpetually, forever,
The Brahma, the absolute being.

(*Utha Sunnya Sikhara*)

'Sunnya' or the zero point, is a fixed condition in the poetic consciousness of the poet. But it is also an ever–evolving process, and by slow degrees it becomes a complete conclusion. It is that primordial source from where all streams of life emerge, and to which they return at the end. Differently speaking, 'sunnya', so far it represents the process of life, is like a circle that has no beginning, no end, and its movement is controlled by itself. In fact, the concept of 'sunnya' in Bhima Bhoi is a complex spiritual experience, not to be assessed by normal human activities, and to that extent not to be visualised but to be perceived. Yet in a way it is a usual and natural consequence of the process of life with which it is linked and to which it provides a radiance and glow. Therefore, at one level, the poet could describe it in familiar terms, detailing out the various steps, like giving an account of something somewhere. Thus the poem *Anadi Mandalaru* (From The Primordial Orbit):

From the primordial circle all moved,
From the formless, in the name of Brahma,
In the vast empty space
Only one Brahma, the complete, the master,
And nothing was seen, no form, no shape,
From unspelt, unwritten was born wilderness
From wilderness was born unnamed, unspoken,
From unnamed was born collective division,
From division was born the first sound,
From the sound was born creative *omkara*,

All went upstream
Settled in sunnya
And played there.

The trend that began with Achyutananda so powerfully and with so much of force, after about 300 years, found in Bhima Bhoi its greatest exponent. What was important in these poems of meditation was their structure of wit and analysis, and coupled with other poems of prayer that showed intense devotion and submission, they contributed, almost continuously, for more than 400 years, from the mid-15th century till the later 19th, a rich substantiality to ancient Oriya literature, particularly poetry, and to that extent promoted the attitudes towards life which are fundamental to human living, and constitute a benign part in any growth of human civilization. Religious perception in ancient Oriya poetry is an extremely important aspect of the total literary heritage of Orissa, and for this, one should feel grateful to the innumerable known and unknown poets who lived in their different localities, many of which were extremely inaccessible in those days, and yet shared in the common atmosphere of prayer and meditation, and could create a commonality of religious perception, so intensely and so sincerely, across time, without any thought of personal name or gain.

* * *

7

NATURE IN ORIYA POETRY

The earliest references to nature in Oriya literature can be seen in Sarala Das. Then subsequently, for the next about 400 years, till mid-19th century, as Oriya literature mainly developed in one form, that is poetry, there used to be frequent references to nature as a pervasive structural content. In these, nature was mainly viewed in its physical aspects, such as sun, moon, spring, summer, rains, trees, birds, flowers etc., as separate objects, providing a background to whatever might have been the subject matter with the poets. Probably the only variation used to be, when a change in nature or in natural conditions, such as winter changing to spring, or the strong rays of the sun giving place to soft light of the moon, occasioned similar changes in the moods of the characters. Beyond this, other types of complications were mostly rare, except that very occasionally there used to be a distant perception of nature having its own identity, that is, a life of its own independent of other factors. The complications in the perception of nature came along around late 19th century, with Radhanath Roy, and have continued with many ramifications ever since.

Sarala Das wrote three books, **Bichitra Ramayana**, **Mahabharat** and **Chandi Purana**, and whenever he refered to nature it was with a view to provide it with a physical identity keeping the items of nature as distinct and separate in the total frame. Thus in the first book, when Sita goes to the forest escorted by Lakhman, there are references to the number of animals such as, 'wide-bodied' elephants, 'graceful-looking' horses, cows that look 'like elephants', and deer, hippos, lions, tigers as well as many more animals and birds :

> As they entered into deep forest
> The animals looked startled.
> Happily the great lady looked around -
> And there were animals and birds galore.

Elsewhere as Sita sits on the ground the poet speaks of 'shady' trees, 'cool wind' and 'tolerable heat' Or elsewhere in **Mahabharat**, the

reference to the forest is just by way of saying that it is full of fierce animals and birds, or even when references are made to other aspects such as sunrise, sunset or change of season, the things are just stated. On the whole the poet is aware of nature, but the awareness is of nature as something existing around.

The same approach to nature, but probably with some greater detail, can also be seen in Sarala's junior contemporary, Balaram Das, who wrote **Jagamohan Ramayana**. A good example is the well–known sequence where Jarata, the leading public-woman, and her team of ladies, go to bring the great rishi Risyasringa to Angadesa, so that the rains will come and the land will fertilize. They journeyed along the river by boat through dark, impenetrable forests and saw many unusual sights, such as, elephants fighting with each other and also elephants copulating, the tigers running after deer, the lions tearing the rogue elephants, the white mongoose running after big rats, as also colourful peacocks dancing and swinging, and gulls flying along the course of the boat. On the whole, the items of nature, as birds, animals etc., are seen and visualized separately and are only distantly linked with the sequences of the story. Some difference in approach to nature can be seen in Jagannath Das, Balaram's contemporary who wrote the most popular Oriya **Bhagabat**. The poet looks at nature not only as distinct items as in Sarala or Balaram, but also having its own distinct activities, and whenever linked with human actions it is always with a moralistic end. Thus when the poet refers to rains it is with a specific awareness :

Now the summer is over
And the rains have come.
It's the best of all seasons
And it brings plenty to earth.
The clouds join in the sky
And the lightening joins them,
And over land, sea, sky, everywhere,
Blue, deep clouds spread,
Like a universal form.

But the rains have their meaning too, vis-a-vis, the human action. Thus rains bring happiness to many, as worshippers get their happiness from their worship; or people get confused and miss their paths in the fields

since plants grow everywhere because of rains, as the Brahmins get confused when they forget their Vedas; or the clouds hide the moon, as untruth hides the truth; or as the learned men feel happy when they see their guests similarly the peacocks feel happy and dance when they see the clouds.

The tradition of nature in poetry set by Balaram and Jagannath were generally followed by poets who came after them, though there have been elaborations and expansions depending on changing poetic contexts. In the 16th century, change of seasons fascinated many poets. Thus Debadurlav Das (16th century) who wrote **Rahasya Manjari**, a fine musical kavya on Radha–Krishna theme, describes the agonies of lady–love on being separated from her lover across the span of a year, through the changes of season. It begins with the summer followed by the rains that darken the night, and thunder and lightening make one restless; to the autumn and winter when the north wind blows and dead leaves fall; and finally to spring when trees flower, the fragrant south wind blows and the cuckoo sings from inside the flowering branches of the mango–trees. Another poet, Sankar Das (16th century) refers to the changes in seasonal nature and the consequent discomforts, particularly in the forest, through the worries of Kausallya, Rama's mother, at Rama's banishment *Baramasi Koili*. Thus the summer, the rains and the winter bring the inconveniences of heat, rains and cold respectively to the travellers in the forest, and even spring makes them mentally restless for love and love–making. At the same time emphasis has also been put on one season, for example, on the rains. Narasimha Sena (16th century), in his kāvya **Parimalā** describes the coming of rainy season in detail, that is, how clouds cover the sky, days become dark, thunders roll and lightnings spark like eyes twinkling. Then the rains never cease and the rivers, as they roar down from the hills, overtop their banks. But also flowers like *ketaki* blossom, and birds like peacocks dance in glee. Similarly Raghu Arakhita (16th century) a fine lyric poet, describes the beauty and pleasures of spring, when the sky becomes clear, the flowers blossom, and the spring wind blows through many leaves, and gods come out to play with colours.

A little later, in the transitional period between the 16th and the 17th, Bishnu Das, an important poet, also wrote of the rains. The kavya

is entitled **Kalabati** and the context relates to an account of emotional agonies of the lover, the prince, on separation from his lady–love. The awareness is as has been seen in the earlier poets, that is, with the coming of the month of Asadha (June–July) the clouds cover the sky, a sharp wind blows from the east and the days become dark and noisy with the sound of clouds. Then many flowers special to rainy season bloom and many birds, particularly happy at the coming of the rains, sing and dance. Also water comes in torrents from the hills and fills all the streams around. Elsewhere, in another kavya, entitled **Premalochanā**, where the poet describes the love dalliances of the young lovers (the young king and his lady) in forest, there are graphic accounts of a large number of trees and flowers as well as the sweet singing birds –"Then the night comes, and the moon rises, and the moon is like so many bright pieces of jewels scattered on the ground and the moonlight drips through the leaves and fills the ground."

In fact the rainy season has been almost like a star–attraction to the poets, which may be because the poets have found it most suitable as a context to focus the emotion of love due to separation. Thus Dhananjay Bhanja and Raghunath Raj Harichandan, both of the 17th century, have spoken of rainy season in detail and have linked it with love. Similar references to clouds on the top of the hills, dark days, rain–soaked earth, bright lightnings and noisy thunder, as well as swans, doves, frogs, and all varieties of rain–time flowers and fruits can be seen in the accounts of the poets. Probably the most well–known account of the coming of the rainy season is seen in **Labanyabati**, the famous kavya written by Upendra Bhanja (1670–1760), a major poet of medieval Oriya literature. As before, the account relates to the agony of the love–lorn heroin on separation from her lover. Also, similar items are there, such as, swans flying against the dark clouds; days becoming darker, shorter and cooler; cuckoos becoming silent and frogs noisy ; and peacocks dancing etc. But its merit lies in its immense musicality as well as the way the items related to the rains are seen at par with the lady's condition. Thus like the continuous stream of rains she cries continuously; as the ground gets muddy due to rains her cheeks become soppy due to tears; as the cuckoo fails to sing she also fails to speak; and as darkness overweighs light so also her sorrowful thoughts overweigh her.

In addition to rains, and in equally memorable verses, Upendra has also given accounts of the spring season as well as moonlit nights, and in both cases nature only provides an independent context to the main thematic pre–occupation, that is, love. Thus in spring the cuckoo sings towards the morning, the sweet wind from the south blows and wafts the fragrance of flowers, and the paths become clear. Similarly, as the moon rises the night becomes graceful, and while moonlight like bright jewels lies scattered in the midst of darkness, it appears as if the white sea now gets mixed with blue Jamuna. – "At this time Pravamanjula informed the beautiful damsel how the sweet spring season had entered the world.– 'Haven't you heard, O young lady,' she said, 'how the cuckoo sings again and again in the dark night ? The mild breeze has started blowing with the properties stolen from the top of Malaya hills. The bumble bee has warned the jasmine flowers that it would steal its fragrance. The lotus looks beautiful with new filaments and pollen tubes, and plenty of flowers have bloomed to decorate the hairs of young ladies". Differently, in the Bridal Night –"Now the night which brings pleasure to all has come. In the voice of the cuckoo it declares that the love–god is favourable and it calls all young men and women to unite. Now the moon has risen and the silvery light fills all around. It looks as if the dark body of the night is now covered with a white sandal paste, or as if the milk white sea mixes with the blue waters of Jamuna, or as if to cool the white heat of the sun, the supreme God has now filled the earth with camphor-dust, or as if the Lord Shiva who carries the moon on his head has now washed the earth–house with white moonlight. The moon like a snare of the love–god now catches the young hearts....". Elsewhere in **Prema Sudhānidhi**, another kavya, Upendra speaks of the link between the lover and the lady-love through a number of comparisons taken from nature. Thus it is like the link between the moon and the night–lotus, though the latter is at a great distance from the moon; or it is like the tree and its leaves though they may fall at a distance from the tree; or in a slightly changed way the lover's welling – emotions while in separation from his lady–love, is like a river in flood, and the lover does not know how to cross it.

Probably the most graphic and comprehensive account of nature, particularly as related to seasons, is seen in **Rasakallol**, the famous

kavya of Dinakrushna Das (1650–1710). Its subject matter relates to Krishna's amorous early life, and the accounts of seasons are linked with the changing moods of the characters in love. But the accounts in themselves have a lot of sweetness and charm and also some newness of perception in comparison to other such accounts of the time. Thus when the spring comes and south wind blows it is the time for the flowers and fruits and sweet singing birds. But most important is, it becomes synonymous with the God of Love who provokes love in love-lorn hearts. The summer follows spiring. The fruits ripen, but many flowers cease to bloom and people dance on the scorching ground like horses dancing on the battle–field. Also fire breaks out in forests, and mirages can be frequently seen. Then the rains come. The clouds overcast the sky, days become dark, the insects, birds and animals become happy, the earth becomes cool and watery and farmers work happily in the fields, and green vegetation sprouts everywhere. Thus this is how he describes the coming of spring:

> The time of flowers came
> And the wind blew from the south,
> The messenger of Lord Kamadeva
> Sang excitedly in five tunes,
> The Love God's pride became intolerable
> And the love-obsessed women got frightened of flowers....

and the summer coming after spring:

> Slowly the sweet season ended
> And the summer time came
> And the rays of the thousand-bladed sun became fierce as fire.
> O good men, what to say how earth burnt,
> And the travellers danced
> Like the horses in the battlefield ...

and then the rains:

> Slowly the summer was over
> The month of Asadha came
> And dark threatening clouds rose in the sky.
> They roared fearfully far and near
> Swallowed the tops of hills
> And all directions were lost in darkness.

In fact Dinakrushna's awareness of nature was both comprehensive

and intimate and his accounts of seasons were among finest such accounts in ancient Oriya poetry. But as in others so also in him, aspects of nature are seen separately as individual items and only loosely linked with the main subject matter or main themes.

A different attitude to nature could be seen towards the end of the 19th century, in the poems of Radhanath Roy. Radhanath, like the earlier authors mostly wrote kavyas, but unlike them, he broke away from mythological and Radha-Krushna themes and treated his subject matters in a manner to suit the changing tastes of his time. He frequently used nature by way of comparison or for providing the related context. In fact to speak of nature was one of his main forte, to the extent that he was often called as the 'poet of nature'. Apart from his references to nature in all his kavyas, he wrote one complete kavya (746 lines) related to nature. It was about the lake Chilika, on the eastern coast of Orissa, and was entitled **Chilika** (1892). It gives a detailed-account of many places in and around Chilika as well as its manifold natural beauty such as its vast blue water, innumerable migratory birds, innumerable colourful fishes, picturesque islands, jutting mountains and overhanging forests all along the coast hiding small, quiet villages, and also changes during the day and the night and the change of seasons. One such lively account is when the poet describes the moonlight and the coming of night. It runs as follows in prose translation –" The white moonlight falls on the vast blue expanse of Chilika even to the distant horizon. The fishermen's boats now dot the eastern line. They have seen the evening star on the Valery hill and as they return home from the sea their happy songs float lazily over Chilika. The spirit of the songs moves over blue water and vanishes in white moonlight. All around, in sweet moonlight, the sweet maidens laugh and sing... Now the night has come; the noise is no more; the earth is quiet. The waves of moonlight have flooded the sky, earth and water, and all look as if washed in mercury. The hills, the islands, the forests, the trees, the leaves and stones – everywhere the moonlight falls and glitters. The chequered forest looks like the body of a snake. The hills and the forests are quiet, men do not move, only the cricket sings, only the distant stream murmurs. The night deepens. The peace reigns everywhere". This perception of nature is different from what has been seen in Oriya poetry earlier. Nature is no

more a list of items seen and spoken about peripherally. It now assumes its own life – an organic entity on its own right. No doubt the poet links nature to the sequences of subject matter in his kavyas. But it becomes as much alive as any aspect of the subject matter or any character in the kavyas. This change in perception launched a whole line of poets looking at nature with warmth and intimacy.

Such poets were Madhusudan Rao, Radhanath's closest friend and contemporary, Gangadhar Meher, Nanda Kishor Bal, and Chintamani Mohanty etc., as well as a little later poets such as Gopabandhu Das, Nilakantha Das and Godabaris Mishra etc. None of these poets were as much devoted to nature as Radhanath was, but they generally continued his lead and together projected a changed attitude towards nature in the first three decades of the 20th century. As has been said, this changed attitude could be seen, first of all, in treating nature as an organic entity having a life of its own, and secondly, by merging nature with a transcendental mystic spirit that animates all things and rolls through all things. Though the initiator for the changes was Radhanath, yet it was due generally for the socio–cultural changes in Orissa during the later part of the 19th century – new education and particularly the influence of the 19th century English Romantic literature.

Thus Madhusudan wrote of seasons, sky, river as well as of the natural beauty in the villages, and in each case the account of nature came out remarkably alive. Similarly Gangadhar in his famous kavya **Tapaswini** not only personified dawn as it came to wake up Sita in Valmiki hermitage, but at the same time captured the sweet tranquillity of day-break through such aspects of nature as bird's song, cool breeze and blossoming flowers. Nandakishor, who frequently wrote of village scenes and situations, also wrote of small familiar birds and animals in graphic detail and great sympathy. Chintamoni, in imitation of Radhanath's **Chilika**, wrote a kavya on Salandi, a picturesque river in north Orissa. Nilakantha, who wrote a kavya on Konarka, the famous sun temple, gave accounts, as a part of it, of a stormy full-moon night spent there by him and his students. The accounts moved through a contrast of a fierce storm that raged through the night and the hopes of a glorious moon-lit night in a full–moon day coming through chequered shades, white sands and full tides:

Wait O winds, O rains wait,
Let the night be a full-moon night
Let the stars rise across the blue waves
Let the moon, the night's glory,
Shine in the sky rubbing the earth's mirror,
Let the silvery rays from the sky drown the earth
And let the fresh sand beaches laugh in the moon.

The nature not only provided the context to Nilakantha's story, but also mingled with the poet's joys, hopes and melancholy, particularly as related to his strong motivation towards a keen spirit of nationalism. This aspect was fully realized in Gopabandhu, the famous political leader and nationalist. Gopabandhu's poems were almost always related to contemporary nationalist agitations inspired by Gandhiji, and his references to nature formed an integral part of his total movement. A well–known poem is *Bandira Swadesh Chintā* (Home Thoughts of a Prisoner) where the cool, soothing south wind blowing across and over Orissa in the south is welcomed as a friend by the poet, imprisoned in the Hazaribag jail in the north. The south wind boosts the poet's morals, brings happy recollections of his own land of great natural beauty, and as a whole provides a much – needed release to the poet's own pent–up emotions. Godabaris, another eminent political leader and nationalist, wrote a number of fine ballads based on situations in and around his own place, Banapur on Chilika. In these ballads as well as elsewhere, in a number of lyrics, the poet always saw nature at par with his motivations and desires. Thus in his well-known poem *Kālijai*, which describes the tragic drowning of a young bride in Chilika in a fierce storm, the nature becomes both an agent of action as well as an extension of the mood and feelings expressed in the poem.

But to look at nature with a mystical perception, that is, to be aware of a greater animating spirit behind and through nature, more or less inspired by the poetry of Wordsworth, though generally considered and accepted by the poets as an important attitude towards nature, could be seen concentrated only in a few poets, and particularly in Madhusudan, for which he was generally known as 'Bhakta Kabi' (Devotee–Poet). In this respect his most well–known poem was *Himālaye Udaya Utchaba* (The Rise of Dawn over the Himalayas). The poem pictures the silent

glory of the dawn breaking over the mountain ranges of the Himalayas and describes how the dawn's illumination flames sublimely all over the sky. Then it goes on to say how the 'illumination' penetrates into the poet's heart, and the poet's soul merges in the soul of nature, and the nature's soul flows through the poet's soul. Finally the perception goes deeper, to an awareness of an eternal spirit, the 'fountain-head' of all beauty, with which the poet's soul merges:

In your sternal, unfathomable soul, oh my King,
My soul merges in absolute solitude.
The eternal union with the Eternal,
And in great glory my whole being blossoms.
....
Oh, Fountain of all beauty, oh Eternal,
Without beginning without end,
My whole being merges in your overflowing stream.

The above ways of looking at nature were more or less common with the Oriya poets, as is already pointed out, mostly in the first three decades of the 20th century. But even in the thirties and forties, till about Independence, these attitudes towards nature did not substantially change, though there was a decreasing emphasis on nature per se. This could be seen in the important poets of the period such as Kalindi Charan Panigrahi , Baikunthanath Pattnaik, Mayadhar Mansingh, and Radha Mohan Gadanayak etc. Nature in most of the cases was viewed with a romantic love and longing, and formed an important part of the poet's own feeling. Thus in Kalindi Charan's poems such as *Pāsoridelire Simulipāla* (How I Forgot all, O Simulipala) or *Manenāhin* (Forgetting) etc. nature contributes to the main themes of nostalgia and pain. In Baikunthanath's poems such as *Yātrāsangita* (The Journey's Song) or *Naba Barsānubhuti* (Feelings for New Rain) etc. nature is related to perceptions of mystical movement in one case, and romantic, youthful love in another. In Mansingh's poems such as *Mahānadire Jyostnā Bihār* (A Boat Journey in the Mahanadi in a Moon-lit Night) or **Hemapushpa** sonnets, nature leads from thoughts of darkness to light, first of all, in an awareness of its individual beauty ("The moon climbes/ The vast earth lies calm, silent/The river is calm like a tired child/The wings of bright night cover earth, sky, water"), secondly, aligning

nature to love and to love's pleasures ("My love/Just from bathing came/ Is she a part of golden autumn I thought"), and thirdly, like Madhusudan earlier, in the contemplation of a life-giving animating spirit through nature ("In this great silence/Under the moon/ I am amazed at a great beauty/ And wonder whose touch is it/Beyond words/I bow to Him"). In Gadanayak's poems such as *Chirantani* (Undying), *Pradhān Pata* (Pradhanapat), *Mausumi* (The Monsoon) and *Kaniar Phula* (The Hibiscus Flower) etc. nature takes a beautiful life of its own in a subtle personification, the best example being *Mausumi*, where the rain bearing winds come with great power and speed bringing days of cool hope to a parched land. A change in attitude towards nature became visible generally with a change in taste after Independence and complex problems of modern existence with all its related feelings of alienation and futility, relegated nature to a peripheral position in the total comprehension.

Sachidananda Routray provided the link. In the poems that he wrote in the thirties and forties he viewed nature in consonant with other writers of the time. The references to many aspects of nature in the villages could be seen in many poems, particularly in the poems of the volumes entitled **Pallisree** and **Bhanumatir** Desa. The nature was seen both as a self-contained unit, alert and alive, as well as contextualized with poetic emotions. But in Routray's later poems, in the fifties and sixties, the attitude towards nature changed. Instead of a direct clarity in attitude what was seen was the richness and complexity of metaphor. Nature alone could no longer move the poet, structurally it became a part of an approach towards analysis of existence. Thus in a poem entitled *Jyamiti* (Geometry) love, nature and love's desires and nature's fruitfulness are all related to each other in a metaphysical compactness to move towards a final suggestion of loss and emptiness. Similarly in another poem *Smrutilekhā* (Memory) the references to nature are used symbolically to explore layers of understanding in time and space. Or in another poem *Kharā* (Sun), the nature becomes the part of a creative process, creating atmosphere and attitudes, and the warmth of the sun is seen in many forms and colours symbolically filling up the thousand lonely chambers of the mind in innumerable fragrance. Yet in another poem *Āswina* (Autumn), various items of nature in the autumn season become part of a rich and fruitful existence, leading to a sense of health and

plenty and finally to a startling realization of one's own soul in ecstasy– "In the house of happy joy/In the clouds of white rice, white swans and white jasmine."

This changed attitude towards nature could be more eloquently seen in the poems of major post-Independence Oriya poets. Thus Guru Prasad Mohanty's famous poem **Kalapurush** (The Hunter) which deals with a perception of death-in-life, and a dry, sterile suffering with no hope of purgation, nature, particularly the coming of rains, provides the main symbolic motif force in the poem. First, there are references to the rise of the rain-bearing clouds ("First the rains came/That day/In the stream of scattered clouds/And standing on the bank of Mahanadi/Startled, amazed/I saw the rise of pouring clouds of Asadha"). Then, an awareness of richness, fruitfulness and bliss that the rains bring. But the rains finally fail, the movement goes through desert and darkness and the end is one of illusion and tiredness –"Silent sands/Sands and sands/Dry grass and sands/Gray earth without end/Pale sun and gray sky/Thirst and thirst without end/Pale, gray, silent".

Similarly, in Bhanuji Rao who had a strong sensitiveness for the beauties of nature, the references to nature contributed symbolically to an inner perception of overpowering sadness. Similarly, in Ramakant Rath and Sitakant Mahapatra nature is never considered for its own sake, but always as a part of the total structure contributing to the essential perception of the complexities of modern existence. Thus in Ramakant's famous long poem **Baghāsikār** (The Tiger Hunt) the references to forests, mountains, and to movements along unknown and unfamiliar forest roads, are merged with other references taken from myth, folklore and urban living, to project the tiger both as a symbol of physically aggressive force and as the new life-force of regeneration and redemption. Similarly in another poem **Āmar Bimarsha Bhāgya** (Our Melancholic Fate) the references to flowers, clouds, horizons, mountains, and sky and trees and wind are merged with references from the worldly life and from the process of ageing, to arrive finally at an awareness of new life and happiness – "When at nights I wake up/ And fail to sleep again/Then the sky appears vast/Then the trees whisper about sunset/Then the strange songs float freely from the stars/And the flowers wet with dew lisp like children".

Sitakant wrote a whole group of poems related to sea, collected in the volume, entitled **Samudra** (The Sea), where the poems are variously organized round a central perception, almost in the form of an extended metaphor. The perception deals with complementary as well as superseding conditions of mind where the sea symbolizes destruction and the instrument of final deluge, and at the same time as the primary source of life, the repository of all knowledge, that generates cycles of fertility and fruitfulness. A good example may be noted in one of the poems in the said volume, called *Saharare Samudra* (The Sea in the City) where the sea is seen as an insider :

> Then
> Inside the man's body
> In that breathless yellow-city at the centre
> In the secret, strange whispering of words,
> It was announced
> That the sea has come – the sea,
> It is sitting in the last row of the auditorium,
> It is standing cross-legged at the street-corner.

The sea is no longer just an item of nature, nor it remains having a separate identity. It gets involved with the social life on the one hand and with the complications of mind-body nexus.

It is a far cry from Dinakrushna, even from Radhanath. The modern poet's reaction to life has many facets. An awareness of nature is one of them. It is important to the extent it deepens the poetic reaction and makes it additionally meaningful. But what is relevant is the way it has always sustained the Oriya poetic mind and has provided it with new and newer ways to perceive and understand.

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8

HUMOUR IN ORIYA LITERATURE

Probably the earliest examples of humour in Oriya literature may be traced to the 15th century, to a particular type of poetical composition, called **Kalasā Chautisā**. The writer was supposed to be one Bachha Das, whose whereabouts are not known. The poem is in 136 lines, and the story relates to the familiar mythological account of Parvati's marriage with Lord Shiva. Parvati, as the daughter of King Himalaya, went through a lot of ordeals to win Shiva as her husband. When finally the marriage was fixed up, Shiva came in the guise of an ugly, old man to marry. That nonplussed the bride's side, particularly her friends and the mother, who spoke harshly of the old age of the bridegroom and the inconsiderate decision of the father to fix up the marriage of such a youthful lady with such an old man. This constitutes the main subject matter of the poem, and the humour arises from the paradoxical situation where a really strong, youthful person (of the immense prowess of Lord Shiva) is shown as a dilapidated, old man, and is railed against. The poem begins with Parvati's friends talking to Parvati, disapproving her father's choice of a decrepit, old man sitting as the bridegroom on the 'golden altar'. The old man's physical inability is graphically described:

> His legs and hands are swollen
> His eyes are steaming with water,
> He has no sense
> He appears as if dead.
> He can't recognize people
> He can't see
> He can't hear
> His eyes have gone into their sockets
> And his stomach is like a newly-dug mine.
> His limbs appear decomposed
> His clothes torn, dirty
> His body is smeared with ashes
> And ugly snakes cover his head like a garland.

He falls down when he sits
His toothless gums move when he speaks
His ear lobes flutter like dry leaves
He is a dirty, ugly, repulsive beggar.

Naturally Parvati as a young bride feels hurt and lost, and cries. Even her mother feels enraged and abuses her husband. But Himalaya consoles them all, points out what the facts are, and requests them to go through the marriage. At the end, the disguise is removed, everyone becomes happy, and Parvati's friends laugh at Shiva's practical jokes. **Kalasa Chautisa** was a popular poem and was often sung in marriages. Its humour was widely appreciated, though it was at the expense of Lord Shiva and goddess Parvati, and again though, from another point of view, it made a subtle exposure of contemporary realities where often young brides were given in marriage to old men for mean, selfish reasons. The poem had many imitators at subsequent periods of time, to the extent that even poets reversed the situation and created humour by getting a young man married to an old woman:

The women complained before the bridegroom
How is it that your parents chose such a woman,
Who were the maids who went to see her
Were they blind and had no eyes ?

The old woman can't speak out of shame
The cheeks are hollow and the face oblique,
The eyes are like empty coconut shells
The eye-balls big and frightful,
The stomach is sunken like a pot-hole
The legs and hands are thin like ropes
The forehead huge, the ears small
The colour of body is dark as rose-wood.

Apparently it was harmless to create humour at the expense of gods and goddesses. Even Sarala Das, the great epic-poet, did so in an episode in his **Mahabharat**, where goddess Laxmi and goddess Parvati quarrelled between themselves like two common women and abused not only each other but also their husbands, Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva respectively. Sarala's junior contemporary, Balaram Das, who wrote Oriya **Ramayana**,

also adopted a similar technique to create humour, that is, he too humanized the divine beings and treated them as common men and women. His well-known poem in this respect was **Laxmi Purana** (The Story of Laxmi), where the Great Lord Jagannath quarrels with his consort Goddess Laxmi and banishes her from his temple at Puri. He abused her because she had gone out of the temple without informing him, and had visited the houses of low caste people. She got angry and demanded a divorce to which he replied that it would not be possible as it was not in his caste. She in turn also abused Lord Jagannath, returned all the ornaments he had given, and left his temple with one piece of cloth. The whole account is full of hilarious situations, till at the end the Lord's pride is humbled and he begs to be excused by Laxmi, which she grants. At one level the poem is a plea for caste liberalization and free mixing of people. But as a whole the reader forgets that it is about divine beings and takes it at his own level, within his own familiarity, where the quarrels between husband and wife are not so infrequent. Balaram has a fine sense of humour and this can be noted in many episodes in his **Ramayana**. Two examples may be cited. One relates to the seduction of rishi Rusyasrunga by the courtesans from Angadesa. The account is in about 700 lines, much longer than the one found in the original Valmiki Ramayana. The absolute innocence and virginity of Rusyasrunga have been exploited by the wily women from the town, and the whole account is full of exceedingly humorous details. The second example is in a different frame. It is about Hanuman's exploration of Lanka and burning of Lanka. The details are engaging and entertaining. Initially it is Hanuman's depression at looking at so much richness around him, and secondly, it is panic, hurry and anger when Lanka is burnt. The humour grows out of situation and human behaviour.

Subsequently, the poets of the 17th and 18th centuries who wrote major kavyas in the bhakti tradition, dealing with the love dalliances of Radha and Krishna, also tried to put in the elements of humour, though in a minor way. A good example was **Nābakeli** (The Boat Game) by Dinakrushna Das. It is a long poem in about 300 lines, where Krishna is disguised as an old man rowing a half-broken boat across the Yamuna river in spate. The youthful cowherdesses from Gopa, including Radha, come with their pots of milk, and are eager to be ferried across to

Mathura. Their encounter with the 'old' mischievous boatman is extremely interesting and entertaining. They abuse the old, decrepit and wily boatman and yet placate him to take them across. The boatman vehemently refuses and yet agrees to take them across, but only one after another. The first person to be taken is Radha, and in the mid-stream she suddenly finds that the boat is sinking and the boatman feeling extremely helpless about it. The narration is graphic, the dialogues are witty and the whole account exudes with a fine playfulness. Thus the boatman's physical appearance is as follows :

> The eyes are watery, he squints,
> The right leg is swollen with filariasis,
> The head is gray and hangs over his chest
> The body is black and fat
> And the gums are completely toothless.

Again, when he is abused, it is with choicest language,

> Let a snake eat your ears
> Let a ghost sit on your chest
> Let you drown in the midstream
> Let a crocodile eat you.

One is reminded of the tradition of **Kalasa** and the earthy sense of village folks.

But humour as an art, as a conscious component of literature, was first used by three court poets of the 18th and the 18th–19th centuries. They were Brajanath Badajena (1730–1795), the poet, painter, sculptor and linguist; Jadumani Mahapatra (1781–1866), the poet and famous wit; and Kavisurya Baladev Rath (1789–1845), the poet, musician and administrator. Badajena belonged to Dhenkanal, in the Dhenkanal district; Jadumani to Itamati, in the Nayagarh district; and Kavisurya to Athagarh in the Ganjam district ; and apart from the kavyas which they wrote, each had compositions explicitly motivated by humour. Thus Badajena wrote **Chatura Binod** (Four Entertainments), a book in prose and in four sections, out of which the first section entitled *Hāsya Binod* was devoted to humour. The account related to the attempts of a king to find out a bridegroom for his ageing daughter, which he did, and gave away his daughter in marriage. In the process a few stories have been told, and a few songs have been sung. But the whole account is so full

of inconsistencies and incongruities highlighting character, manners and action that the whole motivation is to provoke humour. Thus the king lives on alms brought by his subjects from other lands; the queen has a swollen stomach which looks as if she perpetually carries a ten-month child in her womb; the daughter is Bilapamukhi, that is, she who always weeps; and the bridegroom is searched in all the holes of the land and is called Mārjāramukha, the cat-faced; the love-union between the bride and the bridegroom is excessively bestial and as tasteful as the rotten corpses in the burial ground; and when they were sent away the dowry was carried on the shoulders of frogs, crabs, stoats, moles etc. The humour was rarely subtle and intellectual. In fact a large part of it lies in verbal ingenuity and in the creation of incongruous situations. Yet on the whole the book succeeds in projecting an atmosphere of humour which was not so deliberately done in Oriya literature before.

The second important book, also a prose work, was by Kavisurya. It was entitled **Hasya Kollol** (The Waves of Laughter) and was written in the poet's adult matured days. It was written in the style of tales told by 'Kathasagar', or wandering minstrels who used to move from village to village telling tales to village–folks. Hence the story moves at a slow pace, with many turns and elaborations, and in an alliterative and rhyming language, with a view to provoke the readers' attention. An interesting aspect of the book lies in its choice of vocabulary, which is an intelligent, and deft mixture of the then contemporary and current Oriya words with a large number of Persian words taken from the court uses, along with the royal slang, that is, the specific category of words used in connection with the kings and the members of the royal families. The subject-matter has two parts. First, it is an account of a king called Vallatkarna (that is, whose ears are small) and a kingdom called Rahasyaghosa (that is, coward's habitation) and various people of the kingdom, including men and women who have permissive habits, soldiers who have high sounding titles but who always run away from battle fields, aristocrats who talk in street language and are addicted to drugs, and prostitutes who are physically repulsive and sinful.

Secondly, there is a court-scene, where the king sits in court and listens to incongruous and motivated submissions made by mischievous courtiers and finally retires to his room. As in the earlier work **Hasya**

Binod so also here, the humour is largely created by verbal ingenuity, and yet, unlike the former, it goes deeper and assumes the form of social satire, where the evils of kingship and the sinful habits of people have been adversely exposed. In fact the writer, who was a major Oriya poet and otherwise excelled in lyric poetry, also wrote a few poetical pieces explicitly motivated by humour and satire. Two such pieces were *Sarase Kahiheuthae Sina* and *Jagate Kebala* wherein the poet's subtle mixture of humour and wit in a frame of social satire could be profitably seen. **Hasya Kallol** is a matured work. It entertains and sets readers thinking of the incompetence and dull–headedness of the kings and the king's people. It would be interesting to note a distant similarity between the king's court in **Hasya Kallol**, with the famous court of the goddess Dullness in Alexander Pope's **The Dunciad, Book IV**. In both, the dullness and unintelligence have been satirized. To quote, for example : "Ah, this happened, that happened ! There was a king. The name of the kingdom was Rahasya Ghosa. The area was 150 square kilometres less 1500. All vices were taken as virtues. All men of quality held in contempt. The brahmins had cowherds as cooks. The thirst was quenched by munching grams. Insulting holy men was a pleasure.... A pig is called elephant. Nobody knows who belongs to which caste. The brahmins move around with swords. The teachers and the Vaishnavas are killed out of great devotion. People show off with cheap necklaces. No purification is done when somebody dies. Nobody feels the sun's heat. Everybody is a god to himself. Tattered clothes are luxurious beds. Sex-act is publicly declared. Grandmothers and grandsons live as wives and husbands. Bamboo pieces are great weapons. The day's work is done at night and the night's work at day. People never remain faithful to their wives. Permissiveness rules in the family. The army numbers ten thousand less hundred thousands. Ah this happened, that happened ! There was a king. The name of the kingdom was Rahasya Ghosa.... Let us narrate the virtues of the king, such as, his heroism, courage, tolerance, intelligence, beauty. His name is Vallatkarna (small ears). Ghumra (a small instrument) sounds heroically at the Lion's gate. The king is greatly resplendent. What are the ethics of his administration? King Janak never had that. King Yudhisthira did not have that. Neither the King Bhoja had, nor had Mandhata Chakravarty, nor had King

Vikramaditya. The king always grovelled with eulogizers in dust, always stayed in inner apartments even long after sunrise."

Jadumani did not have any complete work on humour to his credit. He was more famous as an extremely witty poet who could immediately, on all occasions, produce short pithy and witty poetical compositions with devastating effects. Such of his compositions numbered about 100. But all these grew from immediate context and assumed significance mostly in the context. As witty, humorous pieces they circulated from mouth to mouth and elicited financial support for the poet from the kings. Initially some of these with notes were collected as **Jadumani Rahasya** (The Romances of Jadumani).

With the beginning of modern age in Oriya literature, that is, from around later 19th century onwards, the new writers came to accept humour and wit as essential integral parts of total creative structure. This was first seen in the writings of Phakirmohan Senapati, the famous novelist and story–teller. Thus in many details in his writings with references to oddities in characters, incongruities in situations, illogicalities in actions, inconsistencies in statements, as well in make–shift social manners and behaviours, humour and its accompanying wit could be seen as important elements. In fact Phakirmohan's style had an almost continuous humorous twist. All along the reader becomes aware of a fun–loving creative mind. At one level it aims at relaxing the reader's tension, but at a different and more serious level, provides the writer with an objective strength not only to mercilessly expose many social lacunas, but at the same time to understand and assess how or to what extent evil as an important factor operates in man's life and controls his destiny. Phakirmohan's novels to be mentioned in this connection are **Mamu** (The Uncle) and **Chhamana Athaguntha** (Six and One Third Acre), and stories such as *Patent Medicine*, *Garudi Mantra* etc. as well as his autobiography **Mo Atmajiban Charita** (My Autobiography). For example, the story *Patent Medicine* points out how an erring husband can be brought to book, and reversely the story *Garudi Mantra* tells us how an erring wife may also be brought to book.

In the novels there are a number of women–characters, particularly at a slightly lower strata of the society, to mention a few, Champa

(**Chhmana Athagunthe**), and Chitrakala and Nakphodia Ma (**Mamu**), the most famous, who have been conceived in a deft mixture of humour and wit and afford great pleasure to the readers. Thus this is how he speaks about Champa – "Of all people inside the palace, nobody knows what relationship Mangaraj has with Champa, alias Lady Champa, alias Harakala. People are also ignorant of her caste, race and father's lineage. Nobody has also enough ability to understand from her manners whether she is a maid–servant or the woman–head of the house. We can only say this much that in Mangaraj's household Champa holds unlimited power. Even her powers are more than what Mrs. Mangaraj holds. The farm – workers, labourers, to the extent the clerks of Mangaraj's katchery (office), all bow to her with folded hands. One name of Champa is 'Harakala' (many coloured). Truly speaking, we have never heard anybody calling Champa with that name. What is the etymology of the word 'Harakala', whether it is one of appreciation or slander, we can't say. But one day somebody brought to her notice that people call her 'Harakala'. She got very angry and complained before Mangaraj. There was a lot of search, enquiries went on for two days, but where from it came, how far it had spread, nothing could be found out. At last the Master warned – 'Okay, Okay, we will see! Be careful ! Nobody should call Champa Harakala.' That day, from this end of the village to the other end, even in the adjoining villages, everybody warned everybody else – 'Be careful ! No body should call Champa Harakala.' A month passed, two months, four months, six months – everybody, from young women to old women, from youngmen to old people, whenever a few gather, they look around, smile, and warn each other – 'Be careful ! Don't call Champa Harakala.' " Even Phakirmohan's autobiography is replete with humorous incidents, generally at the expense of arrogant, illiterate kings of the feudal states, and at times also at the writer's own expense. The point is, Phakirmohan is never accepted as a humorous writer per se, but humour provides an important ingredient in his otherwise strong indictment and criticism of the contemporary society and its many facets.

Phakirmohan's mantle as regards humour descended on his junior contemporary Gopal Chandra Praharaj , the famous lexicographer and belletrist. Of his many writings two prose works may be particularly

noted. They are **Baimahanti Panji** (The Diary of Bai Mahanti) and **Bhagabata Tungire Sandhya** (The Evening at the Bhagabat Club). The former deals with contemporary social issues such as female education, widow remarriage, the impact of new education, the conflict between the old and the new as well as many day to day issues beginning from daily market-role to cases in the law courts. Similarly the latter book contains discussions for 10 evenings in the village club house called 'Bhagabat Tungi' by people who are educated, semi-educated as well as uneducated on, as in the former case, varieties of topics, but mostly related to rural problems. Thus at one level these discussions have serious purposes and they not only convey the point of view of the writer but also aim at social reforms. But the discussions have been presented with a penchant for humour and wit with a view to highlight the inconsistencies and incongruities in speech, character, and action etc. Thus beginning from the village apotheocary and village-teacher, to money-lenders, businessmen, and officials in the court, all have come under scrutiny with a relaxed humour and underlying mild satire, as a result of which the pieces entertain as well as provoke people to think.

In poetry too, and particularly in two poets, Lakhmikanta Mahapatra and Godabaris Mahapatra humour could be seen as a powerful poetic element. Many of Lakhmikanta's writings, including prose pieces, short plays and long and short poems, were motivated by the contemporary political situations of the twenties and thirties at which he often laughed exposing their basic incongruities and illogicalities. Thus he composed a satirical, humorous fictional autobiography of a non–co–operationist, and wrote short satirical humorous plays with contemporary political relevance entitled, **Naba Ramayana** (New Ramayana), **Bhabisya Bharat** (Future Mahabharat), **Dimbakresi Sabha** (Democracy–Conference), and **Hanumanta Bastraharan** (Rape of Hanuman), which were related to mythology, as well as other pieces such as **Bheta** (Meeting), a meeting among the Viceroy and Gandhi and Jinnha, **Bhota Bhikāri** (Beggars for Vote), **Bhota Geeta** (Vote Song), **Mantri Barani** (Welcoming the Ministers), **Āmar Swadhinatā** (Our Independence), and **Gandhi Gola** (The Gandhi Chaos) etc., all of which were fine poetical pieces with a lot of humour and mild satire against political personalities and their actions. But Lakhmikanta's best humorous pieces are the groups of parodies he

wrote of well-known, and popular ancient Oriya poems and songs including the famous 'Champu' poems of Kavisurya Baladev Rath. Its purpose which he stated in his preface to the poems, was to bring in humour with a view to provide an "entertaining picture of modernity through a skilful use of language". Thus songs related to intense and varying feelings of love between Radha and Krishna in a Vaishnavite frame and in an emotional love language, have been reset at a lower level of crude, routine life, in a harsh, conversational language, the sole purpose being not so much to ridicule as to entertain the readers through a changed perspective. In these Lakhmikanta's contributions have remained unique in Oriya literature. Besides he founded **Dagaro** (1937), the first Oriya literary magazine to highlight humour in literature, which continued for many years as a pioneer journal in the area.

Godabaris Mahapatra's main concern was in contemporary politics about which he wrote mostly in poetry, in great detail, and at times with pungent bitter satire. Yet all the time he exhibited a sharp, fun-loving mind and his satire was always tempered with humour. He too founded and edited a journal called **Niānkhuntā** (The Fire–Fling) which ran for about 27 years (1938–1964) and quickly got established itself as the most important Oriya journal incorporating wit, humour and satire mostly related to politics and political personalities. Most of the writing in the journal were done by Godabaris himself and in course of years they piled up to provide a sizeable body of strictly humorous writing in Oriya literature. Some of his poetical volumes that may be mentioned in this context were **Kantā O Phula** (Flower and Thorn, 1958), **Bankā O Sidhā** (The Straight and the Crooked, 1964), **Hāndisālare Biplab** (Revolution in the Kitchen, 1952), and **He Mora Kalam** (Oh, My Pen, 1951) etc., all together containing hundreds of short poems. A few quotations may be apt at this point.

Thus in a poem entitled *Garibar Durgā Staba* (A Poor Man Worships Goddess Durga), the poet regrets that the Goddess Durga who visits the earth once a year, behaved just like a minister who always stays away from common people:

> Oh, Mother ! you came on a visit and returned soon
> I only want to know what was your programme.
> Drums were sounded in the towns

The streets were crowded by rich men
I wonder how you have become like our ministers !
Did you really come riding on a new motor car ?
I wonder who named you 'Universal Mother'!
People with money pushed each other to see you
And many had garlands in their hands,
And when I see the crowd around you
I wonder – have you become a minister yourself ?
Because as people worshipped you with garlands
You didn't say no to anybody.

Or, in a different vein about a modern woman :

A pair of restless eyes
And a pair of gogles,
A soft red lip
And an empty neck,
Both feet carry a pair of colourful slippers,
A small, thin saree like a mirror,
Two lotus like arms half-clothed,
Slik like tresses that deceive every heart.
Combine these, a woman of the town -
A ship to cross the ocean of love !

Another interesting poem about the politics and the politicians is entitled *Se Kete Dura* (How Far is That). The poem refers to two important political personalities of modern Orissa, Harekrushna Mahatab and Biju Pattanaik. The time was 1961, when Biju Pattanaik after sweeping the polls emerged as the new leader of the Congress Party in the place of Dr. Mahatab, and formed a new ministry under his leadership. The references are how people in pursuit of power and pelf moved away from Dr. Mahatab's place ('Biharibag') to Mr. Pattanaik's place ('Tulasipur') in the same Cuttack city, a few kilometres away :

The river on this side gets dried up
The ships sail in the river on the other side,
The flowers drop off from this tree
The other tree is sprouting with blossoms.
Would you say my brother, how far is that,
From Biharibag to Tulasipur ?

The trees on that side full of greenery
The days and nights full of laughter,
The stump of an old tree this side
All foliage, beauty, grace gone.
Do you know my brother, how far is that,
From Biharibag to Tulasipur?
The temple on this side is locked
The temple on the other side is open to all,
And all devotees and beggars of this side
Celebrating the newly–born on the other.
How far is that, O brother,
From Biharibag to Tulasipur ?
The bridegroom left the altar this side
Let us go straight to the altar on the other side,
Oh, you traveller, don't delay
Come, get together, reap benefits.
Oh, my brother, how far is that,
From Biharibag to Tulasipur ?

Godabaris's poetry had a pleasant sweetness. Along with that he combined an immense capacity to develop a new sudden meaning about the familiar, day to day objects of life, wherein pungent irony could be mixed with a wave of laughter, to develop ultimately a serious point of view.

In fact humour has been like a convenient tool in the hands of many modern Oriya writers. In Gopinath Mohanty's novels and stories, in fact, in his writings as a whole, it provides an implicit strength to both, point of view and style. A good example is his novel **Dānāpāni** which employs both humour and satire to portray a man's rise in official and social status through unscrupulous and immoral activities. Elsewhere, as in **Mātimatāla**, his epic–novel about Oriya rural life, and in a number of details, such as, in the quarrel between the two village-women, in the sudden attack by 'ghosts' on the village-tout in the evening outside the village, or even in the portrait of the tout himself- ("He was dark, thin and tall, and his face was smooth and clean shaven because it was hairless from birth, and his bald head was like a longish wood-apple fixed to a long iron–rod... When he stares at anyone in the face from his hollow

and sunken eyes, his fixed gaze seems to sear through and cling") or even in stories, such as, *Nā-Mane Nāhin* (Amnesia) and *Hasibaku Heba* (One Has to Laugh) etc. element of humour is both entertaining and also provokes one to think seriously. In fact in Gopinath's writings, as in Phakirmohan's, humour is an ubiquitous element, not just a veneer, but an integral part of the structure, a medium of assessment and evaluation, and a contributing strength in the total vision these writers project about life.

In Phaturananda (Ram Chandra Misra, 1915–1995), Mahapatra Nilamoni Sahu, and Chaudhury Hemakanta Mishra humour could be seen more eloquently. Phaturananda was originally associated with **Dagara**, which he edited for some time, and frequently wrote in its pages. He wrote a large number of stories and sketches mostly related to contemporary social and cultural situations as well as a long, extremely interesting parody of Sarala's **Mahabharat**, entitled **Sāhi Mahabharat** (1987). It was, like the original Mahabharat, in 18 Parvas, in about 8000 lines, in verse, and a graphic account of life, living conditions and quarrels of people who lived in the 'Sahis' or lanes of Cuttack city and in a typical, conversational language of the place. Thus instead of Lord Ganesh, as in the real epics, the Governor is addressed in the beginning:

> Oh, great Governor, take my submissions
> Because the time of Lord Ganesh is over.
> You remove all obstructions, oh, husband of ministers,
> All born and die on you order.
> And a grain of kindness from you, oh Lord,
> Makes one to move like the bull of Lord Mahadev everywhere.

Or, the account of people and their houses in the Sahis in Cuttack :

> When people relax and sleep
> The mosquitos come and sing sweetly,
> To make the air move freely
> The rats come and dig tunnels in the walls,
> And the poisonous snakes move happily
> To take people to heaven.
> The jackals howl at lanes to show time,
> And shrubs and bushes everywhere
> Where people defecate,

And children have a right to defecate
On both sides of the main road.

If one is reminded of 'high' epic and 'low' epic. **Sahi Mahabharat** comes closer to the latter. It is full of hilarious passages that aim at entertaining readers but always with an underlying sense of satire that aims at correction of social habits.

Mahapatra Nilamani has written stories, a few novels, essays and innumerable sketches on issues of topical interest, Whereas in Phaturananda the humour is largely verbal and associated with social satire, in Sahu it often goes beyond to become a part of the attitude towards life, that is, his stories, which are basically serious interpretations of life, have often, at a different level a comic understanding from which the whole experience can be viewed and assessed. Three of his story-collections particularly, **Andha Rātira Surya** (The Sun of the Blind Night, 1971) **Annya Rupa Rupāntara** (Metamorphosis, 1973) and **Abhisapta Gandharva** (The Cursed Gandharva, 1983) may be mentioned in this connection. The stories have humorous details, both verbal and situational, and at the same time they provoke emotion and enlighten experience. Chaudhury Hemakanta has mainly written stories, and among the three is probably the only person who writes with an avowed purpose of creating humour, which he successfully does mainly pointing to many inconsistencies in men's characters and manners.

Dagaro's contribution to the growth of humorous literature in Oriya was significant. It particularly kept its pages open for such writing and generally created an awareness for such writing among the readers. After Lakshmikanta who was its founder–editor, its editorship was taken up by his able son, Nityananda Mahapatra (born 1912), a well–known novelist, story–teller and poet who too wrote a number of humorous stories. Some other writers associated with **Dagara** were Pulin Behari Roy (1907–1980) and Sunil Mishra (born 1926) both of whom wrote a number of humorous stories, as well as Deba Mahapatra (born 1926), who also separately edited and published a short–lived Oriya journal, called **Kumkum**, from Bombay, devoted to humorous literature. Among the recent exponents one may mention Udaynarayan Padhi, who writes parodies, and Achyutananda Kar, and Kulamani Mahapatra.

Probably it was in the 18th century that 'humour' came to be used to distinguish the genial and affirmative forms of comic writing then in vogue, from satire, mockery and ridicule. And today, one may note, it is being widely used as a generic term for everything that appeals to man's disposition towards comic laughter. One may recall Plato's statement that "at comedy the soul experiences a mixed feeling of pain and pleasure". Humour is that pleasure and pain, a specific emotional pleasure in experience. Oriya literature in general, and the attitude of Oriya writers specially, has a strong comic viability, and humour is an integral part of the whole. This is evident not only in such ancient authors as Bachha Das, Sarala Das and Balaram Das, but also in the two great masters of modern Oriya prose, that is, Phakirmohan and Gopinath, and in many others, where humour has been both a tool and a part of the attitude on the one hand, and on the other, a matter of perception to understand and realize the essence of life.

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NATIONALISM AND POETRY ORIYA SCENE

The Hindu Orissa lost its Independence in 1568, after which it came to be ruled respectively by the Muslims, the Moghuls and the Marathas, till 1803, when the soldiers of the East India Company marched into Orissa to crush the Marathas, and Orissa came to be ruled by the British. The new rule created more problems than it solved, though it was presumed that people in general would welcome the new regime after long years of deprivation, misery and misrule. In fact the new administration either could not respond to, or did not think it worthwhile to appreciate the local modes of living, and a tradition, many ways different from the one it has been accustomed to, in Bengal. Thus the newly occupied territories in Orissa were designated as the 'district of Cuttack' and were kept under the Bengal Presidency, where they came to occupy a minor position in the total administration. All regulations promulgated in Bengal and Bihar were made effective in Cuttack. And while no attention was paid to the spread of education in Orissa, the mode of judiciary, police organisation as well as revenue administration etc., were directly taken from Bengal and were made operative in Orissa without considering to what extent they improved upon the existing systems. To cap it all, the local people were progressively replaced in all seats of power as well as in the possession of landed property, by the outsider Bengalis. Thus between 1806 and 1816 as many as 1011 estates, out of a total of 2340, were taken out of possession from Oriya Zamindars by Bengali rich men and officials, most of whom looked after their estates from distant Calcutta. The situation was in no way improved, because of the apathy of the British masters. The result was a general social exploitation and economic deterioration. The deep–rooted resentment of people burst out in the revolt of local militia men, a revolt called 'Paika Rebellion', in 1817, which the Oriyas consider as their

first 'War of Nationalism' It took place at a place called Khurda, near Bhubaneswar, under the leadership of Baxi Jagabandhu Bidyadhar, the military commander of the Raja of Khurda, and was motivated to establish the rights of local people on their own property against the intermediaries who had converted the land into a 'colony inside a colony'. The rebellion was, of course, suppressed. But it brought a change in the atmosphere , provided a new awakening both among the rulers and the ruled, and in short, fertilized the ground on which the Oriya nationalism was to flourish. The immediate result was a greater interest in the spread of education and a greater concern for providing more and more jobs in the administration to the sons of the soil.

The next event of importance from the point of view of nationalism, paradoxically, was a famine called 'Na Anka', referring to the 9th regnal year of the King of Puri. It raged in such an epidemic proportion that according to an official estimate, it took a toll of about a million lives, which was almost one third of the population of Orissa Division at that time. The local administration came under heavy fire from no less a person than Sir Stafford Northcote, the then Secretary of State for India, who said, "This catastrophe must always remain a monument of our failure, a humiliation to the people of this country and to those of our Indian officials of whom we had been perhaps a little too proud." The famine took place in 1865--66, after about 50 years of 'Paik Rebellion', and though during these 50 years there had been some progress in Orissa, it was actually after the famine that a real attention was given in Orissa to administration, to education, to social reforms, and to economic upliftment, and in short to accept the Oriyas as a body of intelligent, competent people with a long heritage and tradition. The time was ripe for a national awakening. The feelings were coagulated, first of all, by the encouragements and promotions advanced by the administration that tried to do away with the intermediaries and come to people directly; and secondly, by the attack of some Bengalis, including the noted historian Rajendra Lal Mitra, on Oriya language, declaring that Oriya was not a separate language and should not be made the medium of instruction in Orissa. The cudgel was taken up by Oriya intellectuals and educated people, particularly the writers, who wrote books, started periodicals and newspapers, established printing presses and organized

literary societies and clubs. The most important among the periodicals was **Utkal Dipika** (1866) which was founded and edited by Gaurisankar Roy, and which almost came to symbolize the new Oriya enlightenment; and the most important association was 'Orissa Association' (1877) which acted as the nucleus of Oriya nationalistic spirit, till it was supplanted by the larger and more forceful, 'The Utkal Union Conference' (Utkal Samilani) in 1903. In fact the Oriya nationalism came to its maturity and adulthood only after the great famine of 1865-66, in the later part of the 19th century, and continued in its full strength till 1936, when a separate province of Orissa was formed. Its motivations were cultural, social and political, in that order, and the most dominating principle was to achieve an identity of respect and dignity for the Oriyas. Its leader and guiding spirit was Madhusudan Das (1848—1934), a lawyer by profession who was affectionately called by the common people as 'Mr. Das', and who has come to be reckoned by subsequent generations as 'Kulabrudha' (The Elder). Mr. Das's, stand as regards the spirit of nationalism, was ably supported by writers, pre-eminent among whom was Radhanath Roy, the first, most important modern poet of Orissa.

Radhanath was in charge of Orissa's education at that time, as the Inspector of Schools for Orissa Division. As a part of his official duty, and often also independent of it, he travelled extensively throughout Orissa - a remarkable feat considering the inadequacy of communication in those days. His wide travels were reflected in his poetry, most of which were long, narrative poems dealing with the fictional as well as semi-fictional heroes and heroines from Orissa's past. Radhanath's poetry not only broke with the past poetic tradition, but at the same time, created a completely new taste for the readers, and in this his nationalistic attitudes had a major contribution. The poet's nationalistic spirit had initially two directions. First it revelled itself in a very comprehensive account of Orissa's immense natural beauty - its rivers, mountains, lakes, forests etc., as well as its many places of pilgrimage and glory. Secondly, it moved to the past, to invoke the past days of heroic action and adventure. Subsequently, he contrasted the contemporary misery, distress, and low spirit with the past richness, and pointed out its incongruity in the midst of nature's plenty. Finally, the spirit rose to a sublime awareness where in veiled language he railed

against the foreign occupation of the land which he considered as the root cause of all its present misery. Apart from his narrative poems, Radhanath wrote a long descriptive poem on the lake Chilika, entitled **Chilika**, wherein he described manifold aspects of the lake with a good deal of love and affection, and always clothed with a fine romantic imagination. He also wrote an epic (which he could not finish) based on the Last Journey of the Pandavas, entitled **Mahajatra**, which in fact was an exploration of Orissa's great beauty and India's past glory. As Radhanath wrote after the 1865-66 famine (most of his poems were published in the last two decades of the 19th century) and at a time when the country was under the strict control of the Britishers, he was intensely aware of the realities around him and his spirit of nationalism was both a protest against the contemporary dispensation and an expression of a new awakening and a new consciousness.

In **Mahajatra** the poet expressed his nationalistic sentiments very succinctly. The Pandavas, in the wake of their Last Journey, and after leaving Hastinapur and moving along the course of the Ganga, finally came to the remote shores of Nilachal, that is, Puri, where from inside the 'vast watery wilderness of eternal blue' rose a resplendent Agni, the God of Fire, and accosted them. To the question of the Pandavas about the whereabouts of the place, Agni answered - "It's your greatest good luck that you have come to this holiest of all lands - the only place in the whole of Bharat, which the Great God has chosen for His earthly stay", and,

> As a flower shines brightly in a pad of leaves
> This wonderful land of Utkal
> shines with all her virtues...
> Where gods come from all over Bharat to inhabit,
> And which burns dross out of man
> As fire burns dross out of gold.

These sentiments have taken a different turn in **Chilika**, where the poet mourns considering the present plight of his land which is so beautiful and so charming. He addresses goddess Saraswati :

> Oh, Goddess, tell me, for what sin,
> Your kindness is so little for Utkal;
> She is a land of beauty,

And yet, without your kindness
She is like a woman without clothes,
Like a wild-flower in wilderness,
Spurned and ignored.

But Radhanath's sentiments were not always confined to Orissa. He has often gone beyond, to the country as a whole. Though in **Mahajatra** he extols Utkal as the best land in Bharat, the poem is basically about India, its past glory and present plight. The nationalistic conviction was an integral part of the poet's total poetic consciousness, and its clearest expression is seen in a singularly interesting poem, entitled *Shivajink Utchaha Bakya* (The Exhortations of Shivaji). Generally the poem is localized, in the sense that it has its references to a particular time and community. But it is a symbolic poem, and shows in unmistakable terms, the poet's anger and resentment against the contemporary foreign domination :

Now the cruel Javanas rule,
And the power of Khatriyas is of no avail;
This land of ours is not ours,
Fie, fie, on our courage, on our power,
Fie on our pride !

And elsewhere, in the same poem, he speaks of 'Mother India':

This land of Bharat , our Mother,
There is no land as holy,
She is a mine of rare, wonderful gems
She is best of all lands.

Radhanath was probably one of the earliest poets in India to compose a national song in Sanskrit, which began, *Sarbeshan no Janani Bharat-Dharanikalpalateyn*. It was composed in 1908, immediately before his death, and was meant to be sung as an inaugural song at the Utkal Union Conference at Puri.

Radhanath's lead in voicing nationalistic sentiments was taken up by his contemporaries and juniors. Thus his close friend and poet, Madhusudan Rao, who otherwise composed fine devotional lyrics, also wrote eulogistically about Orissa and India. Some of these poems were collected together in 1908, in a volume entitled **Utkalgatha** (The Songs of Orissa), which was dedicated to Madhusudan Das, the great leader

and patriot. It contained poems in celebration of Orissa's beauty, places of worship and importance as well as of past heritage, There were also references to India's glory as well as to the country's great names and deeds. Even earlier, in a poem entitled *Bharata Bhabana* (The Thoughts About India), the poet, while feeling unhappy at the country's present condition, has almost ecstatically gone back to the past - the past of great thoughts, great deeds and great faith, almost by way of compensation and contrast. But Madhusudan's clearest sentiments were seen in his hopes for the future which he presumes would be much better than the present. Thus in a poem entitled *Nabajuga* (New Age) he draws people's attention to the glimmering of a new dawn :

Oh brothers, look at the sky !
The night of sorrow ends
And dawn breaks,
And light of love from heaven
is scattered everywhere;
See, how the golden light of love
Touches the crown of Bharat
See, how the scattered pieces of Bharat
Join together in one unison.
Sing, sing together-
Glory to Bharat !

Another of Radhanath's contemporaries and a good friend, Gangadhar Meher, voiced his nationalistic feelings by drawing the attention of readers to the need of developing one's own language, which he pointed out , was like one's own mother. This was particularly relevant in the the then contemporary context against the detractors of Oriya language. In a poem entitled *Utkal Bharatink Ukti* (The Statement of Utkal Bharati), Utkal Bharati, the goddess of Oriya language, requests her sons to beautify her, as befits their own mother, with grace and dignity and not crudely, neither in imitation of foreign models. Some of the references are extremely revealing and throb with intense emotion :

Dress me as befits my body,
But please, don't cut my body
because of dress;
Pair my nails if they are long

And put colour on them,
But please, don't cut my nose if it is high...
Please, don't put a hat on my head
And please, don't take away my bangles;
Also please remember
To put a paint of vermilion, always
On my forehead...
The innumerable streams of Andes mountains
Cannot flood your land,
And who will take away your heart's heat
Unless my holy stream flows across it.

The time was around the beginning of 20th century – the beginning time for the famous organisation, Utkal Union Conference. The spirit of nationalism, particularly as related to Oriya speaking areas and Oriya language, was very much in the air. Apart from Radhanath, Madhusudan Rao and Gangadhar, other important writers of the time, such as Phakirmohan Senapati, the novelist and poet, and Nandakishor Bal, the poet, also responded to the spirit of the times. Thus Phakirmohan wrote poems such as *Utkala Krushak* (The Farmers of Orissa), *Utkal Bhumi* (The Land of Orissa). *Utkal Jubaka* (The Youth of Orissa) and *Utkala Bhramana* (Travels Through Orissa) etc., and Nandakishor concentrated on giving the details of Oriya rural life. But the man who consciously brought Oriya nationalism at par with Indian nationalism and equated it with Congress agitation and struggles for freedom, was Gopabandhu Das (1877–1928), himself a political leader almost of the stature of Madhusudan Das. He was an active member of Utkal Union Conference, and himself set up a national school at Satyabadi, near Puri, in 1909, which was in a way the precursor of the more famous school set up by Tagore at Santiniketan, in 1911. He became a member of the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Assembly in 1917, and joined National Congress immediately after that. He was imprisoned in 1923–24, during the Non-Cooperation movement, and till his death, which happened untimely when he was 51, he came to occupy a position of love and respect in the minds of people as a great nationalist leader.

Most of Gopabandhu's important poems were written during his imprisonment at Hazaribagh Jail, in Bihar. Apart from their nationalistic

content, coming from a political leader and social reformer whose attitudes were clear and straight, the tone of his poems was also clear and direct. But they were full of emotional intensity and what drew readers towards him was his deep conviction and sincerity. For him the individual and the nation were one, and as his individual self merged in the nation's, all the sorrows of the nation came back to be manifested as the pain and suffering of the individual. Nationalism had been the main orientation in Gopabandhu's poetry, and the structure of his poetic emotion was shaped by that. In an earlier poem entitled *Rela Upare Chilika Darsan* (On Seeing Chilika from the Train) he refers to Orissa :

The same mountains are there
And the same forests
And the same river beds full of same stones,
But where is that heroism –
And the old pride of Oriya nation.

Again, laterly, in a different poem, and in reference to Barabati, the famous ruined fort in Cuttack, he contrasts Orissa's present plight with the past glory (*Bandira Swadesh Chinta*) :

Oh Wind, you might have played at Barabati
In those glorious days,
But what do you see in Barabati today –
Is it a dream or reality ?...
Once the camphor vanishes
The cloth remains,
At least the cloth smells the fragrance of camphor,
But once the cloth is burnt
Only ashes remain.
Tell me, who can have patience to tolerate that ?

In his two famous collections, **Bandira Atmakatha** (The Soliloquies of a Prisoner) and **Karakabita** (The Poems from the Prison), he comes directly to Indian nationalism and to the ills of foreign domination :

The rules that never benefit the people,
The rules that torture and put pain in people,
The manipulation that puts one nation
always over the other,
The guile that binds thirty crores of Indians

As foreigners in their own land -
As dogs in their own country,
And makes my countrymen starve
And makes my Mother India work
As a slave at another's door...
Those are not the rules I obey
My forefathers and the rishis never approved that,
They violate the justice and amity of Arya dharma...
I declare, I can't obey them,
I declare, it's not a sin to disobey,
It is Bharat's destiny to rise and destroy them forever,

Gopabandhu was ably assisted by two other fine poets, who had also assisted him in running the Satyabadi School. They were also political leaders and social reformers and were actively engaged in the movement for unification of Oriya speaking tracts. They were Nilakantha Das and Godabaris Mishra. The former wrote an excellent kavya on Konark, and the latter wrote a number of lyrics, particularly fine ballads, based on local tales and anecdotes. The poem on Konark, entitled **Konarke** (In Konarka) by Nilakantha, has two parts. The first part gives an account of a stormy, moonlit night at Konark, and the clear morning next day ; and the second part narrates a tragic love-romance related to the building of Konark temple. Though there have been references to present-day misery and plight in the poem, on the whole, both the parts invoke the spirit of courage and adventure of the old, past days, and a veiled anger against the present torture and exploitation. Similarly in Godabaris's poetry, particularly in his collection **Alekhika** (The Portraits) the poet has portrayed the past glory of Orissa through a number of well-written and well-chosen tales and stories. In the poems of Nilakantha and Godabaris there are elements of both hope and diffidence, but in Gopabandhu's poetry there is the additional projection of a vision, the vision of a new land and a new country, free of torture and oppression, and full of freedom of spirit and movement.

Something akin to Gopabandhu's vision can be seen in Lakhmikant Mahapatra's popular poem *Bande Utkal Janani* (Hail to Thee, Mother Utkal). The poem has the frame of a national anthem and was influenced by the famous nationalistic song 'Bande Mataram'. Yet it typically

expresses Oriya nationalistic sentiments through a portrait of Orissa's beauty and plenty. Its beginnings is full of excitement :

I worship thee, Mother Utkal,
Always smiling , always sweet-tongued,
Oh, Mother, Mother, Mother !
The holy seas wash your body,
The line of palm trees dot your shores,
The white rivers, and water-drenched air,
Oh, Mother, Mother, Mother !

This love for 'Mother' is also seen elsewhere in Kuntala Kumari Sabat, a fine woman-poet, who spent most of her time in Delhi as a doctor. In a poem entitled *Janani Tohar Mohan Murati*, (Oh, Mother, How Graceful You Are) she expresses her affection as follows :

Oh, Mother, your figure so graceful
Like sandal-paste on my heart,
And your dense forests and mountains
Like heavenly gardens to me...

Padmacharan Pattnaik, another good poet of the time, picked up Dhauli, the mountain near Bhubaneswar, near which Asoka's historic Kalinga battle was fought as a place full of past memories but now ruined, like Konark or Barabati, to express twin sentiments of glory in the past and unhappiness at the present. The poet's feelings even go beyond the limitations of time and place, and have been expanded into the wider fields of the country and the nation, where the poet grieves the ill-luck of his country when many others have gone forward and achieved success. Similar sentiments have also been expressed in a number of poems of Mayadhar Mansingh, the well-known poet and educationist. In one of his poems entitled *Mahanadire Jyostna Bihar* (Boating in the Mahanadi in Moonlit Night), as the poet links the past glory with the present feelings of diffidence, he becomes aware of the beauty of the moonlit night and the eternal grace of nature. But the feelings of sorrow and unhappiness also continue :

Why didn't the nation die
When the glory ended ?
Why didn't the destiny strike it down ?
To be like a skeleton as of now

Is hundred times worse than death !

It has been mentioned earlier how the spirit of nationalism in Oriya poetry got slowly equated with struggle for freedom. This became particularly so after 1920, with the beginning of the non-cooperation movement, the poems of Gopabandhu Das being the first clear expressions of those sentiments. As intensity of freedom struggle grew, more and more poets were drawn into its ambit, till the whole thing more or less came to a natural end with the achievement of Independence, after which the nationalistic poetry largely lost its old appeal to the newer generation. One of the last, and probably one of the finest examples of nationalistic poetry in Oriya, which was particularly equated with contemporary political agitation, was **Baji Rout** by Sachidananda Routray. It was a long poem, with an exalted, rhetorical tone, and was first published in 1938. The background related to a 12 year old boatman boy, called Baji Rout, who was shot dead during ex-State agitation, in Dhenkanal, because it is said he refused to ferry the soldiers of the king across the river in one dark night, in 1938. The boy's body was brought to Cuttack and cremated with full honour due to a martyr. The poem idolized the young hero, and showed him as a beacon light in the prevailing darkness :

It's not a funeral pyre, oh my friend,
It's an ever burning flame under the country's darkness;
It's not to burn itself out
But to burn others – always, ever after....
He is not anybody's son,
He is that eternal seed of freedom
That grows through the poet's dream.

Nationalism was a strong element in Oriya poetry, particularly before Independence. It began with Radhanath, after the great famine of 1866, and for about 70 years thereafter innumerable poets subscribed to its flow. Generally the poets have felt piqued at the contemporary situation and have gone back to the more cohesive and more glorious days of the past by way of relief and compensation. Again many have exhibited anger and irritation not only at the foreign rule, but at themselves and at their own countrymen for their timidity, inaction and passive acceptance of adverse and undignified situations. Again, many others have thought

it fit to join the main stream of freedom struggle to voice their hopes and aspirations within a collective, community attitude and conviction. On the whole, the poetry of nationalism in Oriya, though not as chequered to the extent it might have been, may be elsewhere, yet had a strong unified approach and understanding, almost at par with similar poetry elsewhere in India. Yeats termed nationalism as a public theme. It may be so. But it is basically an individual's exploration into public mind, and to that extent Oriya nationalist poetry has become both viable and substantial.

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T.S. ELIOT AND MODERN ORIYA POETRY : A STUDY IN ASSESSMENT

The Waste Land was published in 1922, and **Little Gidding** in 1942, and in between Eliot's most important poems were published. But by 1939, when the Second World War began, T.S. Eliot's had been the most important name to conjure with, and in the world poetry-circle he was much admired and respected. In fact Nobel Award to him in 1948 was only a belated recognition and only put a stamp on that which had become an accepted fact. The point is, during the intervening years between the two World Wars, Eliot's rise to prominence constituted almost a unique source of power and inspiration to sensitive poets all over the world, and particularly in those places where English literature was studied or English language was spoken. In other words, in thirties and forties, Eliot's poetry became a potent source of influence on alert, sensitive Indian poets, and his criticism and critical views provided a strong element of nourishment to advance critical intelligence. The times were uncertain, the changes were rapid, and in those years immediately before Independence as the Indian sensibility was trying to adjust itself to the new, complex predicament of living, it found a kinship with Eliot, particularly with the poet's vision and understanding of life. Tagore was aware of Eliot, and it is pointed out that Tagore's later poetry had some affinity with that of Eliot. But in Bengal it was the other group, the poets younger to Tagore, such as Sudhindranath Dutta, Budhadeb Bose, Bishnu Dey and Samar Sen, who were closer to Eliot in spirit and form, and in a way put forth their reactions to contemporary life as significantly as Eliot had done in his poetry. But it was not so in all Indian languages. It was surely not the case in Oriya poetry in the thirties and forties.

Oriya poetry at that time was motivated, first of all, by a strong spirit of nationalism, and secondly, by a romantic attitude towards life,

that is, an attitude borrowed from English nineteenth century romantic poetry, the distant models being Wordsworth, Shelley, Tennyson, Rupert Brooke, and at close quarters, Tagore. Allied to this, as a result of Bolshevik revolution and spread of Communism, there was the left-oriented poetry motivated towards a revolution and a new dispensation in social matters. In fact all the three motivations could be seen joining together in many poets who could switch over at ease from the one to the other, depending on the need and convenience. Secondly, and more importantly, the latter two motivations assumed a manifesto like existence and a number of poets allied with the one or the other. Thus one was called 'Sabuja Kabita' (Green Poetry), that developed a meditative-melancholic attitude towards life and nature in consonant with English romantic poetry mainly coming through Tagore. The other was called 'Pragatibadi Kabita' (Progressive Poetry) that developed a rhetorical defiant attitude at par with the prevailing ideas of social equality and nationalistic challenge. From the late twenties till one comes to Independence, the Oriya poetical scene was full of noises, first by the 'Sabuja group", that tried to communicate feelings of nature, love, adoration of beauty and spiritual and mystical feelings etc., and next by the 'Pragatibadi' group, that through organized associations ('Nabajuga Sahitya Sansad') and literary journals ('Adhunik') manifested a desire to exploit socio-political realities poetically. A few examples would be to the point. They of course do not provide the full gamut of Oriya poetry written at that time. But they hold up a strong representative status against which the post-Independence new Oriya poetry, a poetry inspired by T.S. Eliot impinged.

A good example was Baikunthanath Patnaik's poem *Yatrasangita* (The Songs of Journey). It is lyrical in form and has mystical overtones. The poet refers to a lover who has filled his life's cup in many ways, and expresses his desire to sail his boat to his sea. The lover's touch leads to the blossoming of fading autumn trees, and all along the poet hears his flute in his own heart. At the end it is a journey to an 'eternal Brundaban', to an 'eternal dance', and to an awareness that the life's God has finally appeared in one's way of life. Similarly Kalindi Charan Panigrahi's poem *Pasori Deli Re Similipala* (How I Forget, Oh Similipala) has pastoral elements wherein recollections of a past life

spent in the poet's own village in the midst of nature's beauty and plenty, now mingle with the experiences of a life in the midst of a mountainous nature at Similipal, the reserve-forest in north Orissa – a romantic attitude towards life in the midst of nature with distinct echoes of Rupert Brook's poem 'The Vicarage of Grantchestor'. Another important poem is Mayadhar Mansingh's *Mahanadire Jyostna Bihar* (A Boat Journey in a Moonlit Night in the Mahanadi). Mansingh was an important poet, and the poem was a well-known one. The boat journey is only a context. What the poem gives is a joyous romantic attitude towards life and nature in combination with a melancholic emotional nationalistic spirit referring to the past glories of Orissa. Finally the present feelings of joy and melancholy merge with a transcendental awareness of a spirit almost of Wordsworthian type:

In this great silence, under the moon,
I am amazed at the great beauty,
And I feel a touch in my heart,
Beyond words, beyond knowledge,
I bow to it...

This meditative-melancholic mood could also be seen in another well-known poem of the time supposed to be an important product of the left oriented literature. It was **Baji Rout** (1938, revised 1943), a long poem by Sachidananda Routray for which the context was provided by the death of a boatman boy called Baji Rout, during the States' Agitation in 1938, in the ex-state Dhenkanal in Orissa. The tone is stridently rhetorical, with a view to romanticize the whole episode, with frequent references to death, life, joy, ambition, hope, sorrow, etc., and the mood is both exultant and melancholic. The poem begins with a proclamation – "No, it's not a funeral pyre / It's an undying flame in darkness/It's not to burn by itself/But to burn others in a holocaust", and goes on to assert – "He is larger than storm/Darker than clouds/His tiny body an undying flame of life", till the final expectation of a resurrection is announced – "Among thousands of pilgrims/ In the midst of courageous freedom/ When you return/ Your silent bugles of victory will be heard from afar." After Independence, particularly in the fifties the climate changed. Neither the mellifluous romantic sentiments, nor the excited nationalistic spirits, nor the 'progressive' declaration about a new age

satisfied the discriminating readers. The tone became urbane, sceptical and witty, and the two poets who led the way were Sachidananda Routray in his later poetry and Guruprasad Mohanty. For both Eliot was a model and an inspiration, for the former indirectly, for the latter directly.

Routray's early poetry, that is, his poetry beginning from early thirties till the end of the forties and which were collected in about 7 volumes, were mainly characterized by romanticism and left-oriented 'progressivism', yet occasionally in poems, such as *Jyamiti* (Geometry), *Pratima Nayak* (Pratima Nayak) and *Mruta Bandar* (The Dead Port) etc., a different tone, and a different attitude to life could be noted. Thus *Jyamiti* which had love, nature, love's desires and nature's fruitfulness etc. seen in a mutual relationship, grew into a metaphysical compactness to move towards a final suggestion of loss and emptiness. Similarly in *Pratima Nayak*, the poet's sympathy for the suffering of a woman acquaintance in the war-torn years of early forties, moved through pity to be ironically resolved in the context of a corroding time in an awareness of ultimate loss and emptiness. In *Mruta Bandar* too, as the past pride was contrasted with the present indifference, the attempt to resurrect the past ended in loss and death. Subsequently in his poems of the fifties and sixties, Routray came to grip with the complications of existence, and his earlier unidirectional romanticism or progressivism gave place to analysis and assessment and a greater awareness of life's multiplicity. In a preface to one of his poetry collections Routroy made a specific reference to the French symbolists as well as to Eliot, Pound and their younger contemporaries. He particularly spoke of the newer sources of imagery to be used as a device in poetry. At the same time he also put emphasis on the need of combining poetic language with spoken language and the utility of incorporating prose virtues in poetry. Routroy's development was towards a metaphysical compactness in language and imagination, and towards a mocking, sceptical tone. All along Eliot remained as a distant inspiration, and in Routray's later poetry, collected in 6 volumes in the fifties, sixties and seventies, in spite of their 'progressive' or 'romantic' bearings, there has been a frequent tendency to contemplate on the nature and process of time, as well as on the nature of futility, as a whole, in life.

But the greater exponent of the new mode in Oriya poetry was

Guruprasad Mohanty. Unlike Routray, he was a student and teacher of English literature and was well-versed in contemporary English poetry, including poetry of Eliot. In this he was ably inspired and supported by Professor Bidhubhusan Das who incidentally in the late forties and early fifties, inspired generations of young students in contemporary British authors such as Eliot, Lawrence, Leavis etc. Professor Das's influence was seminal, and largely shaped Guruprasad's creative powers at an important initial stage. Guruprasad was writing casual poems on love and sentience in a general romantic mode with a tinge of parody at the expense of contemporary romantic writers. This changed, and some of his poems published in the early fifties in the journals brought shock, surprise and a great deal of excitement among the readers, both of older and younger generations. The feeling was it was something new, the type of which Oriya poetry had never seen before, and as if overnight devices such as wit, irony, paradox and ambiguity became popular with young writers, and a general sceptical attitude towards the so called important things of life, including love, ambition, youth became current. In short, Oriya poetry in the early fifties suddenly came of age, thanks to Guruprasad and Eliot.

An early poem was *Gobar Ganesh* (The Impotent). The inspiration was from two early poems of Eliot – 'Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock' and 'Gerontion', and the theme relates to impotency in love–making along with an awareness of growing age, and a general awareness of fading strength in the scales of time. Thus the conclusion is, as in 'Gerontion', "thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season". The poem begins with a sense of loss - a sense that is almost everywhere, in the body, in the brain, in the consciousness, as well as in the 'broken walls of sand', on the 'grey sea beach', in the 'vanishing shadows' in the 'lonely street corner', and the 'trailing cuckoo's songs' in the 'storms of spring'. This is most evident in the protagonist, particularly in his desire to be effective sexually. But he is also aware of the passing time, of leaves falling off continually and vanishing in the wind ("As leaves fall off today in the evening/ As evening tiptoes like a sly lover from this lonely street/ I sit beside the window/ Squeezing things in my breast-pocket/ Jasmine garlands and champak blossoms/ Her saree and her blouse/ And her round breasts and dark eyes/ And my body, my mind, my soul and my

masculinity/ Squeezed in a handkerchief/... Leaves continue to fall/ And dust floats away from the lonely street.") The tension arises from contradictory situations – one at the level of desires, and the allied pretensions, poses and preaching, and the other at the level of reality – reality of passing time and growing age. Any attempt to resolve the tension only leads to more tension, and to a condition of pity and helplessness, where the lady laughs at the pretensions of the protagonist – "If she laughs/ Only laughs/ Bending her body as gracefully as a doe/ If she says/ It's wrong, all wrong/ You are an ass, a fool, a clown/ It's all your fancy of past-forty/ If she ripples like a stream on her bed/ I swallow my spit/ My throat becomes dry". At the end the protagonist accepts the inevitable – of time passing, of people growing old, of youth going to die, and all his musings are his helpless gropings, unsatisfied desires, dry thoughts in a dry brain – "Startled I see/ How leaves fall/ How the trees stand like dark stumps/ And time squints when waves swallow waves/ And the street–corner snarls like the crack in her lips".

A related poem was *Priyabandhabi* (Dearest Lady), also published at the same time. The theme is a desire for love and the protagonist's inability to be effective about it. The poem proceeds at two levels - one, the presence of loneliness and despair due to growing age through which the protagonist now lives, and the other of a past of a meaningful companionship which comes only through recollection. The emptiness of the present is contrasted with the feelings of past fulfilment and at the end they are together resolved in an ironical inevitability of passing time and the related process of decay. Thus a waiting for the lady is almost like an exercise in futility – "Come today, only once, even though everything is lifeless/ These trees, these creepers, this forest, and the waves and sands/ When the moon in the sky is tired and meaningless/ I wait for you/ Full of questions and in doubts", and the final vision is one of complete annihilation when the protagonist, many years hence and in a wasteful time, merges himself with the lady in a condition of complete waste and decay.

The poems ridicule one of the grandest emotions of man, that is, love, and show how existence, compounded of such emotions, is basically an act of futility. The desires clash with effectiveness, with reality, and in the general perspective where time triumphs, the

conclusion is not only loneliness, but of emptiness and helplessness, like a "pair of ragged claws/ Scuttling across the floors of silent seas". The time hunts – an inevitable, impartial hunter, and Guruprasad's next, and most famous poem, was that, entitled **Kalapurusha** (The Hunter). It was written in the late fifties, and was first published in **Prajna**, a pioneering journal of the new mode, in 1960. Its distant inspiration was Eliot's **The Waste Land**, and its impact was instantaneous. One may say, so long the water particles were floating around, now they concentrated into a downpour, and speaking rhetorically, new poetry in Oriya, arrived with a bang.

Kalapurusha was a long poem (379 lines) and it was divided into five sections. It was unlike any traditional long poem that either describes a scene or narrates a story, the type of long poems that were frequently written in Oriya before Independence. Instead it dealt with certain basic attitudes of the modern man who lives a routine, purposeless life in urban conglomeration. The present life is contrasted with the past, and the undertones are provided by a mythical past depicting trust, faith, dedication and purposiveness. Then there are references to love, but again without any power to sustain, and almost like a mechanical and purposeless act. The first section speaks of rains and love. But they do not really help. The protagonist is astonished looking at the continuous movement of clouds. But he is irritated that the rains unnecessarily disturb the dying conditions of the summer heat. Similarly a past love is casually recollected and all its so called romantic conditions are seen leading to a sense of fatigue, disease and death. In fact the present is full of 'darkness', and without any 'direction' ("What is this darkness that swallows all forms / I lose all my directions and up and down/ And there is sand and sand and darkness/ Around my tired body and above it".). There is a quest, but it ends nowhere, and unlike as in Akrura and Udhaba, Krishna's associates of the past myth, the burden which the protagonist carries in his journey only increases his thirst and agony.

Thus the people he sees around him are like shadows without form and substance, and are finally given over to worms and insects – "In the road and under the bridge/ Around the trees and in canal water/ There are so many shadows/ Without nose, without ear/ Without any form of the face/ Only dark melancholy under the cold eyelids/ Unspoken,

unrealized/ Under the coat, pant and tie/ Under the Gandhi cap, and under the silk saree/ Only the sound of worm and insect/ Unspoken, unrealized". The references to rains and love continue in the second section. But again, both bring temporary excitement, and particularly the latter is reduced to a meaningless ritual, without any link of the heart or trust — a restless cogitation of the mind, part of an all comprehensive boredom through which the protagonist lives. The protagonist speaks of a quest, like the old quest of Akrura and Udhaba, but unlike them had not moved anywhere and the end is a condition of disease and death :

In the midst of all Ramu's mischief
That day,
Startled,
I noted for the first time suddenly,
The round fires of his eyes
And his colour yellowish brown,
And I felt as if my skin melted slowly.
I buttoned my blouse, arranged my clothes,
And slept on my side quietly.

The third section refers to Ramu's death. His 10—year old son did the funeral rites, and as all things of Ramu, his superfine dhoti and his French-cut beard were cleanly burnt ; his ashes were returned to the sky, to the wind and to lonely river banks. But Ramu is the protagonist. He is everybody, like all of us — professors, engineers, administrators or police officials — trim, neat, smart, charming ("Like you — soft, powdered, healthy, tall, and straight"). The twin references to rains and love continue in the fourth section. The rains come as before, but they bring darkness and disrupt life. Similarly love is a physical affair, done as a ritual for mercenary purposes. The protagonist tries to find solace, but fails. His journey is endless ; he does not see people but shadows, and all around there is only a sense of loss, fear and waste,

When I cried at the loss of parents, friends, community,
Loss of country, people, wealth, and of cows and
brahmins ;
When I cried sensing the footsteps of time,
And in fear of disease, death, old age,

And in fear of hunters and killers ...

The last section begins with a sense of waste and goes over to put emphasis on a futile waiting on the part of the protagonist. The reference to love is no longer there, and the rains are said to have come probably in the past, but no longer now. The expectations are never realized, and if ever the consciousness returns, it is only to a sterile, lifeless situation. The protagonist is no longer man or woman, he is both, man and woman, and is synonymous with sin. The only activity left to him is only to wait, a dry, sterile waiting ("Silent sands/ And sands and sands/ And pale grass and sands/ And pale earth without end/ And sun without warmth/ And pale sky without end/ And colourless sand and grass/ And thirst and thirst without end/ Pale, silent without warmth/ And sand and sand and sky"). It is an absurd condition, marked by hallucination and broken prayers, and fails to bring any redemption to the protagonist.

It may be seen that the five sections of **Kalapurusha** are not like five steps, where one can move from the one to the other thematically. They are like corridors which branch out from one central point only to move into each other and finally to return to the same point from where they had started. The central point is a perception - a perception of death, or more precisely, death-in-life where values do not exist, where the individual identity is lost, and where the protagonist goes through a dry, sterile suffering with no hope of purgation. The corridors represent quest — a desire to achieve and realize. But the quest is all along through desert and darkness and ends in illusion and tiredness, and at the last count the protagonist is an anonymity - he is both man and woman; he wants to escape from sin but himself a sinner; he is alive but even in a physical sense he is dead. As has been pointed out earlier, one may note the broad inspiration of Eliot's **The Waste Land** behind **Kalapurusha** and there are some apparent similarities too. But the comparisons end there. **Kalapurusha** is a genuinely original poem in the language, a remarkable poetic manifestation of the post-Independence Oriya urban culture, and more particularly, a powerful product, the type of which was never seen before, of the change in taste and understanding that came over Oriya national life after Independence. No doubt **The Waste Land** facilitated the creation of **Kalapurusha**, as the creations of one powerful poet facilitate the creations of another powerful poet, but even

without the former the latter would have come, because both are significant formulations in their own ways, of that immense futility called modern times, and which has transcended all limitations of space and community.

Kalapurusha was published in 1960 and in the sixties Oriya poetry saw the emergence of two major modern poets, Ramakant Rath and Sitakant Mohapatra. Both were well-versed in English and western literature, and the former particularly was a student of English literature. Both Ramakant and Sitakant, like Guruprasad earlier, were motivated by the complicated problems of modern living and their poetry has been a record of tension and paradoxes that continually a modern man faces in his search for identity and sensibility. Their poetry, in general, has moved through many channels subsequently - in ways, that are away from any substantial influence or influences from the West. That is also the case with Guruprasad's later poetry which has moved away from his earlier kinship with Eliot. But both Ramakant and Sitakant, in their early phases, particularly in the sixties, showed affable links with Eliot in form, spirit and attitude, the particular examples being Ramakant's long poem **Baghasikar** (The Tiger Hunt), and Sitakant's long poems, including **Mati O Manisha** (The Earth & the Man) collected in the volume **Astapadi** (Eight Steps).

Baghasikar is only metaphorically a tiger hunt. It is a hunt for words, words that create and uncreate, give life and take away life, and with whom, spread out in multiple facets of existence, the poet wages a continuous tussle to establish himself, and his own identity, in the face of waste and decay. The poem begins with a declaration about words that devour us, like a tiger devouring its victims :

> Words at the first encounter
> Words bloom at the yellow revival of forgotten love
> Words sizzle at the heat of fear –
> They are born and created on their own
> They are drawn away and destroyed on their own
> They float in a nice, murmuring river
> Like a light ship against the stream,
> And then they devour us like tigers.
> And who are we ? –

The tiger's victim is a part of the tiger

The light is a part of darkness when the sun sets.

But it ends with hesitation and uncertainty, and with a feeling that as if the victimization is not possible at all :

Because my little pieces of eyes all scattered, alas,
I cannot see him
Though I have waited all my life ;
The tiger also cannot see me
As I sleep in a crowded hospital
Alone, helpless, in a gray summer,
And I wait to get into that body, O women,
Which I have lost in the jungles along with yours.

Sitakant's poem **Mati O Manisha** deals with isolation, helplessness, darkness of spirit and obsession with death – mental aspects seen in the context of Vasudeb's imprisonment in the prison of Kansa. But as Vasudev waits in hope, however remote and frail that may be, of the birth of his eighth child, who may (or who knows, may not) be able to dispel his suffering (both physical and mental), so also the protagonist attempts to move away from his 'darkness' and emptiness' towards some 'plenty' through his hopes of a contact with soil and fruition. Thus the beginning's encircling darkness,

Darkness inside
Dark, dark
Threads of darkness intertwined interlocking
Supporting on stone, iron -
And doors and doors
And iron bolts innumerable
And thick darkness,
Layers, and layers...

moves to fear of death,

Who are you ?
Who ? Why do you call me ?
Where ? Why ?
I am afraid -
The pale moon outside

And the last hour of the night.

and finally to the dream of the eighth child:

The dark fortnight of Bhadrav
And the sky and the earth
Darkness, darkness
And the middle of the night,
The eight day,
The confluence of Rohini and Vrusha,
And the rain of flowers from the sky
And the noise of drums,
And the horizons bright, glowing
And the divine women dancing all around,
And to a dream of soil and fruition
The invitation of the harvest
The impassioned call of a full–blooded earth
And the dream of the eighth child.
Beyond iron and stone
Beyond bolts and walls
And the harvest moon shines under a silent sky.

Eliot's influence provided a break-through in Oriya poetry, giving rise to a rich harvest, and acted as a fertilizing agent for major modern Oriya poets. Oriya poetry today is established in its own power and vigour. But an acknowledgment of the share of a fine poet whose poetry spurred the movement towards newness and eventual rich growth, is both due and beneficial.

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11

INFLUENCE OF VAISHNAVISM ON ORIYA LITERATURE : A STUDY OF GOPALKRUSHNA'S POETRY

Gopalkrushna Pattanayak or Gopalkrushna was born in 1785 and died in 1862, in southern Orissa, in the ex-state Paralakhemundi (which now forms a part of Gajpati district), in an affluent family attached to the court. His father, Banabasi Pattanayak, was a poet in the king's court and was permitted by the king's order to receive the income from 19 villages for his own living. His mother Lalita Devi, was a quiet, religious lady. Gopalkrushna spent his childhood under the loving care of his parents, and as was the custom in those days, read Sanskrit grammar, lexicon and poetry as well as ancient Oriya poetry and works by Vaishnava scholars. His teacher's name was Baikuli Mohapatra.

Gopalakrushna was married at the age of 23, to Sulakhyana Devi. But immediately after his marriage his family was put to distressing situations. For some reason or other his father incurred the king's wrath, as a result of which his property was looted and the family had to leave Paralakhemundi. They went to Ganjam, a place about 160 Kms north of Paralakhemundi, near Berhampur, on the river Rushikulya. The family settled there, and while at Ganjam, Gopalkrushna came in contact with Chakrapani Bakrabak Pattanayak, a well-known witty poet, who, it is presumed, inspired Gopalkrushna to write poems. But the family's banishment did not last long. It seems Gopalkrushna was invited by the king of Paralakhemundi, Gajapati Narayan Dev, to forget the past and return to his own place, where he was offered appointment in an important and responsible position. Gopalkrushna accepted the invitation, returned to Paralakhemundi and did the king's work loyally and efficiently. All these years Gopalkrushna had continued to write poems and had been increasingly drawn towards Vaishnavism, till finally in his middle age, Gopalkrushna decided to indoctrinate himself in Vaishnavism, which he did under instruction from Lokanath Das alias Binayak Das Goswami, a well known guru belonging to Gaudiya

Vaishnava sect. This conversion substantially affected Gopalkrushna's poetry, in the sense that its mode and direction changed, and it came to reflect chiefly the intention and intimacy of Vaishnava belief. Gradually, the poet came to attain great fame and reputation and the difficulties of his early days, particularly at Ganjam, were forgotten. But his life was not an unharmed bliss. His two sons Gourachandra and Karunanidhi died untimely, and the poet had to reconcile himself to this loss. When he died in 1862, he had already become a legend, and his poems were being sung far and near all over Orissa.

(ii)

The first attempt to compile Gopalkrushna's poems in print was made by Damodar Pattanayak (1863–1915) who included a number of Gopalkrushna's songs in an anthology of ancient Oriya poetry, entitled **Sangeet Sāgar** (The Ocean of Songs), which he edited towards the end of the nineteenth century. Subsequently in 1919, the first single collection of Gopalkrushna's poetry was published by the poet's great grandson, Ramkrushna Pattanayak, under the auspices of King Krushna Chandra Gajapati Narayan Dev of Paralakhemundi. The book contained 307 songs, and was entitled **Gopalkrushna Padābali**. At a later date, around 1959-60 another enthusiastic connoisseur, Babaji Baishnab Charan Das, collected another about 300 unpublished poems of Gopalkrushna. These along with the others that had been already published, were now collected together in a book form entitled **Gopalkrushna Granthābali O Gopalkrushna Padabali**, which contained 619 poems, and was edited and published by Das. The editor in his introduction to the book, acknowledged the source to be one abbot Gopal Das, of a monastery called Radhakanta Matha, in the village Kharada, in the Parlakhemundi State. It was presumed that the poet had probably written most of his poems there as he had stayed in that Math off and on, doing his worships. In the same year, that is, in 1959, Kalicharan Pattanayak, the famous dramatist and himself a fine composer of Odissi songs, edited about 300 songs of Gopalkrushna in a book entitled, **Gopalakrushna Padabali**. But most of these poems had already been published, and the book contained very few unpublished ones. Therefore, till other unpublished poems are unearthed, it would be safe to maintain that Gopalkrushna

wrote about 619 poems, a large number of which were written at Parlakhemundi after his return from Ganjam. Almost all his poems carry his name at the end except a few, which have ended, purely as a mark of courtesy, in the names of the then kings of Parlakhemundi, such as Prataprudra Gajapati Narayan Dev, Gaurachandra Dev, and Padmanav Dev.

(iii)

Thematically the poems of Gopalkrushna can be divided into four broad groups. The earliest are those poems that may be termed as secular love-poetry, that is, poetry dealing with the love of a youngman for a young woman and vice versa, in an idyllic, rural surrounding. Though there might have been some physical sources for those poems – in fact some have tried to trace the beginning in a young, youthful Vaishya girl - yet the poems exhibit a general concern with love as a preoccupation for the young mind which at times becomes deeply introspective and intimate. The references to Radha and Krishna are yet to come, but in the background of these poems one can sense the presence of the 'sly, startled girl' and the 'love-lorn youth' of the Vaishnava love–poetry, though these poems generally conform to the tradition of earlier love–poetry in Oriya. Thus there is an emphasis in these poems on separation and the related melancholic mood, both for the youngman and the young woman. Besides there are other situations, such as the youngman's solicitations, his request for love-act, leave-takings, thoughts about the lady from abroad, the lady's sorrow, and about the love and the love-act. These poems have a wide variety and involvement, and some are distinctly erotic in nature. But their structures are precise and compact, and the love feelings they communicate have the tightness of disciplined emotions. Some good examples are, *Smare dei bandhu na jāre* (Don't, please, leave me to Cupid), *Chakingalā ki bhatilā maneki pānchila* :(Did she look, did she think, did she devise any plan ?), *Jiban bandhu māguni māghuchire etiki* (Oh, my life's friend, I'm asking this much), *Bārinuhe nāri manare, nāgari* (Oh woman, I can't know a woman's mind), as well as longer poems such as *Jaiphula Chautisa*, *Chitāu Chanda*, *Jalad Chautisa* etc. All these poems reflect the poet's deep yearning for love and show his competent mastery over form and

language.

The second group can be termed as devotional poems, or poems related to the feelings of 'bhakti'. They continued to express the feelings of love but with a difference, i.e., the secular communication between two young hearts gave place to unilateral feelings of love tempered with feelings of bhakti. The moods are 'santa' and 'dasya' and in some cases 'sakhya', the devotee making a total offering of himself before his Lord. The poems in this group include 'janan' 'bhajana' and 'kirtan', etc., which in different forms praise the Lord's love and glory, that is, the love and glory associated with Radha and Krishna. Besides there are other poems such as hymns to Sri Gauranga, to Sri Guru and to Radha and Krishna, as well as the poems that express the devotee's desire to go to Braja, and his memories of Sri Brundabana, and such other poems known as 'manasikta' which aim at changing the mind of temptation and sin. Bhakti or devotion cleanses the mind, and though its nature of involvement is different from that found in the relationship between a lover and the beloved, its intensity is as great and the range is probably greater. Gopalkrushna wrote his devotional poems not in any particular period but at different times of his career. Apart from the variety they show, in most of the poems the poet refers to beauty and grace of Radha and Krishna with great love and devotion. Even in poems dealing with Sri Gauranga the poet equates Sachi's son Gaurchandra as Radha and Govinda in one form and worships him accordingly.

The third group deals with poems dealing with parental love or 'vatsalya rasa'. These are some of the most memorable poems of Gopalkrushna. The poems generally express Jasoda's feelings for Krishna as a child, though in each case there are references to concrete situations and incidents and in a different form the poems can be taken as expressing every mother's feelings for her child. Krushna as divine being is forgotten and what comes out in poem after poem is a mischievous, fun–loving child whose games and pranks fill a mother's heart with happiness as nothing else can. The influences on Gopalkrishna in this regard can be traced to two sources. One to ancient Oriya poetry, which goes as far back as the fifteenth century and to Markanda Das, and the continuity of this tradition through Baktacharan and Dinakrushna in the eighteenth century. The other, Vaishnava Padabali poets of Bengal,

such as Shyamchand Das, Jadabendra Das, Ghanaram Das, Balaram Das, etc. who have so lovingly described the childhood days of Krushna. But Gopalkrushna has exceeded both and his feelings of parental love are like honey spilling over a cup and it fills the reader's heart with instant delight and pleasure. The poems such as *Uthilu edebegi kāhinkire* (Why have you got up so early ?), *Mo Krishna chandramā pari āna ke achi sari* (Is there any body like my Krishna ?) and *Brajaku chora āsichi ghenineba sua tunihoi re* (The thief has come to Braja, he will take you away, please sleep quietly) can be the pride in any literature anywhere.

The fourth group consists of the most numerous poems of Gopalkrushna, and his best. The theme of love continues but with much greater intensity and expansion. The protagonists are Radha and Krishna, and the mood is 'madhura rasa', the best of all moods according to the Vaishnavas. In a way one can say that Gopalkrushna in these poems is generally conforming to what is probably the strongest tradition in Vaishnava lyric poetry – the tradition of love between Radha and Krishna and its complications. On the one hand it is very physical, concrete and mundane. On the other, it goes beyond these to a point where 'time' and 'timeless' intersect and 'fire' and 'rose' become one. In describing the love of Radha and Krishna, the poet has gone to many details – to their feelings of affection, anger, restlessness, agony, suffering as well as to innumerable situations that have brought great happiness to the pair, and have completely identified one with the other. Even like any Vaishnava poet he has referred to eight natures of Radha as heroine, that is 'abhisarika', 'basaksajja', 'utkanthita', 'bipralabdha', 'khandita', 'kalahantārita', 'prositabhartruka' and 'swadhinabhartruka' and has illustrated each in memorable poems. But at the same time he maintains that this love has no place for personal desires, in fact anything personal becomes secondary, and it finally emerges in a totality of absorption, in a world of great joy and beauty, where all separation, anger and agony end in bliss.

(iv)

Gopalkrushna's poems depicting the love of Radha for Krishna and vice versa exhibit a whole world of moods, emotions and mental

situations. On the one hand he was conforming to Vaishnava tradition and his poetic reactions were like the reactions of any loyal, devoted Vaishnava. On the other he was par excellence a poet who was sensitively reacting to the complicated motivations of human heart and behaviour to give it a shape through the meaning and significance of words. A few illustrations in this connection may be given. Thus this is how Radha is trying to control her emotions while she sits with her seniors and hears Krishna's flute :

> I know the sound of Shyam's flute will take
> my caste away.
> I was talking to seniors when I heard it
> and it startled me,
> A great happiness filled my heart
> and my body shivered as if in cold.
> I lost my mind
> My sense vanished
> And I closed my eyes and kept still.
> Was it night or day ?
> Was it home or forest ?
> Did I wake or dream ?
> I could not know.

Elsewhere Radha's condition becomes worse when Krishna suddenly comes to the kitchen where she is :

> I drowned in shyness today in the
> house of Braja's king.
> I was with mother Rohini in the kitchen
> when the great lover came.
> My heart beat
> My senses went wrong
> And I split the honeyed–water around me ;
> 'Is the food ready ?' asked the mother,
> I could not answer
> I was so lost ;
> My lips quivered –
> He saw and smiled,
> I could know his sign

And I pressed my lips hard.

But the condition becomes different when Radha meets Krishna on the bank of the river Jamuna :

I met him face to face today on Jamuna,
sitting on a stone on the bank,
I was rubbing my body lazily
when my friend warned me.
I got up quickly
My friend covered me
And my whole body shivered,
My hair was loose
My clothes were untied –
They were not where they should be,
'Wait, wait' – my friend said,
And I was losing my senses
As he came on.
I could not know what to do,
'Dip in water' – my friend said.

But Radha can never forget Krishna. He is always there :

I do not know
Why I see Shyam's figure
All over days and nights.
I feel he is at my back
But when I look he is not there,
And when I look at the front
He hides in my heart,
And when I close my eyes
I dream him in the forest ;
Tell me what it is –
I am afraid to go out,
And my heart pounds
Whenever I hear his name.

Therefore if Krishna is not there why should Radha br there. She feels that she is nowhere without him. She should die if such a situation comes:

Why should I go back home, my friend ?
What pleasure will I have in that house of agony ?

It is better to die on the bank of the Sun's daughter
And let my scorched body float in the waves of Jamuna.

As I have said before, Gopalkrushna was both a Vaishnava and a Vaishnava-poet. But he was more than that. He was living in Orissa at a time when the whole country was reverberating with the songs of Padabali poets, and Puri, the seat of Lord Jagannatha, as well as the countryside in Orissa were full of the songs about Radha and Krishna. In this rich symphony probably Gopalkrushna's voice was most powerful and most endearing. Vaishnavism for him was a catalytic agent, and Radhakrishna themes were like so many objective co-relatives. What he really gave was a sensitive, creative reaction to what was dominant in the minds and hearts of the people at the time. "The poet wrote", as late Dr. Mayadhar Mansingh, a poet of love in modern times in Orissa, pointed out, "only what he said and felt, and the universal entered naturally in his writing because the particular came right from life and not from tradition or conventions as with the others". That was Gopalkrishna's forte. His fine sensitiveness as a poet was combined with an equally fine sensitiveness to his surrounding conditions of living. His belief in Vaishnavism illuminated him as his understanding of men and women provided him with necessary nourishment. What finally came was a rare vision of immense beauty and grace.

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12

VIDYASAGAR AND ORIYA LITERATURE : A FRUITFUL CONTACT

Three most important Oriya writers of later 19th century, the writers who were responsible in laying the foundation of what subsequently came to be known as Modern Oriya Literature, were junior contemporaries of Vidyasagar (1820–1891). The oldest, Phakirmohan Senapati, the poet and novelist, was born in 1843 (died 1918), Radhanath Ray, the poet, was born in 1848 (died 1908), and youngest, Madhusudan Rao, the poet and essayist, was born in 1853 (died 1912). Of the three, Phakirmohan spent most of his time outside Cuttack (the then administrative headquarters of Orissa), in the feudatory states, where he worked as an administrator, and came back to Cuttack to settle at an advanced age. But the other two mostly stayed in Cuttack and distinguished themselves as educationists and educational administrators, and in a way were responsible in building the strong edifice of Orissa education at that time. The first fruitful contact between Radhanath and Madhusudan was in 1864, at Puri, where Madhusudan was a student and Radhanath had joined as a teacher. But the first fruit of their contact came in 1876, in the publication of **Kabitābali** (Poems) that contained poems by both. In fact 1876 was like a watershed that registered a new creative spirit, and initiated the publication of new and original works. It was a new generation, and a creatively aggressive spirit, that was nurtured by western education generally, and by contemporary Bengali literature and various reform movements more particularly. It was bound to be so, as politically Orissa, or the northern coastal districts that comprised Orissa division at that time, remained a part of Bengal Presidency for all administrative and educational purposes. Hence the contemporary Oriya elite was heavily dependent on Bengal, and their mutual intercourse in many matters was as stimulating as purposive.

By 1876, Vidyasagar had become an established phenomena in Bengal

and Bengali literature. He was not interested in literature per se, or for its own sake. On the other hand he was eager to use it as an instrument to further the effectiveness of education and social reform, and in both he had already achieved his aims remarkably well. His bright, burning personality was a model to many, and particularly for Radhanath and Madhusudan he remained as an implicit inspiration. Writing about him, after his death, Madhusudan paid high tributes to him – "People think that he who has plenty of wealth, buildings, vehicles and servants etc. is surely a rich man. But the real rich man is he who through his knowledge, character and virtues bring benefit to the world. Even though he has no money, building, vehicles etc., and even though he may be extremely poor, he remains a real rich man. He is like an ornament to the world, and even though a human being, he is to be honoured as we honour a god. Iswarchandra Vidyasagar was such a rich man"

The first impact of Vidyasagr on Oriya literature was through translation of his books. Orissa came under British rule in 1803, and the British administration took about another 50 years to be consolidated in Orissa. The first missionaries came to Cuttack in 1822, and the first printing press, the first–ever press in Orissa, was established by the missionaries in 1837. Till almost 1850, whatever Oriya books were printed, were done by the missionaries, and were largely related to the propagation of Christianity. It was after 1850, as the company-administration took some interest in the spread of education and directed text–books to be printed, that books with educational purposes and not strictly concerned with religion came to be published. Thus we come across new books on grammar, arithmetic, history, geography etc., along with the printing of ancient Oriya texts – poetical volumes of ancient Oriya poets collected from palm–leaf manuscript sources. Many of these new books were translations from either Bengali or English books and this practice continued for about 30 years till we come to the last decades of the 19th century when new, original books were written and produced, and writers such as Radhanath, Madhusudan and Phakirmohan came to dominate Oriya literary scene.

Interestingly, the first-ever translation of Vidyasagar's book was done by Phakirmohan Senapati and it was published by Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta. Vidyasagar's book was **Jiban Charita** (1849) and it was itself

a translation of **Exemplary Biography** by Robert and William Chambers. Phakirmohan's translation came out in 1866, and was the first book of its type in Oriya. The same year Vidyasagar's **Sakuntala** (1854), being the prose version of Kalidas's famous play of the same name, was published as **Sakuntala Upakhyana**. It was translated by Banamali Singh. Subsequently Vidyasagar's other books, such as **Bodhadaya** (1851), translated by Bichhand Pattanayak (1868); **Sanskruta Byakaranar Upakramanika** (1851), translated by Gobindchandra Pattanayak (1868), **Sita Banabas** (1860), translated by Bichhand Pattanayak (1869) ; **Byakarana Kaumudi** (1853–1862), translated by Gobindchandra Pattanayak (1870), and **Akhyanmanjari** (1863), translated by Chandranath Roy (1872), were published in quick succession and testify to the general popularity and acceptance of Vidyasagar in Oriya language as a whole. The books were no doubt used for educational purposes, as important reading materials in the schools, particularly the books on Sanskrit grammar. But other books, such as biographies, tales, and accounts of Sita and Sakuntala were basically literary pieces, and catered to the new, emerging taste of the English educated new, reading public. Some translations went through a number of editions. Thus **Bodhadaya** had three editions by 1876, and **Akhyanmanjari** two editions by 1877. In addition, two books, **Bodhodaya** and **Sita Banabas**, had two separate translations, done by two different persons.

The great famine of 1866 was a hair-raising experience, in which about one million people of Orissa died and its effect on Orissa's social life was calamitous. But it brought in changes that were equally momentous. First of all there was a big shake-up in Orissa's administration, and Sir Stafford Northcoat, the then Secretary for India, brought a proposal to separate Orissa from Bengal. Added to that a radical change in Orissa's education policy was effected. More schools were opened including schools for girls (from 1867 to 1878 in a period of 11 years, the number of primary schools rose from 794 to 4579); the college at Cuttack was upgraded, and a second college was started at Berhampur; and Oriya was introduced as the medium of instruction in the schools, and as court-language in law courts. Then there was activity in another direction too. The first-ever Oriya printing press, run by Oriya entrepreneurs, called Cuttack Printing Company and Press was

established in 1866–67 and it became instrumental in bringing out the first-ever most important Oriya weekly **Utkal Dipika**. It was edited by Gaurishankar Ray, a man of great courage and involvement, who fought bravely for the socio-political and cultural dignity of Orissa and the Oriyas. All these led to, and in a way also reflected, the very positive awakening that was taking place in Orissa in the last decades of the 19th century - an awakening that Orissa should have a separate entity of its own, a distinct identity and personality, and not as a tailpiece to Bengal or other provinces, as it had a very rich past and a great heritage. The result was obvious. There grew a distinct desire to stand on one's own legs. Thus a new literature evolved, translations from other languages were discouraged and apparently a severance took place from Bengali literature in general and from Vidyasagar in particular. Vidyasagar ceased to be translated from 1877 onwards, and the last record of Vidyasagar translation was probably in 1891 (the year Vidyasagar died) when his **Bodhodaya** was translated by Sitanath Roy.

In fact what happened subsequently was an interesting record of a potent influence. As if Vidyasagar's influence pervaded the atmosphere, and both in subject matter and the use of language his writings became models for many. This was particularly so for Madhusudan Rao, one of the three great writers at the turn of the century. In many areas, such as poetry, prose, literature for children, even in translation, it was obvious that Madhusudan's distant inspiration was Vidyasagar. A good example is the link through Bhababhuti's **Uttar Ramcharita**. Vidyasagar wrote his **Sitar Banabasa** based partly on Bhababhuti's book, at least by his own admission his first two chapters were mostly taken from the First Act of Bhababhuti's drama, and the rest from the 'Uttarakhand' of Ramayana. But Vidyasagar's was not just a copy of the original. He reorgnized and added many details and in a way his work was an independent recreation in a style that had nothing to do with **Uttar Ramcharita** or Ramayana. Madhusudan had two works related to this topic. One was *Sita Banabas*, a poem in about 122 lines, which was published as a part of his book **Kabitabali**, in 1876. The second was a translation of Bhababhuti's drama done in a mixture of prose and verse, between 1885 and 1907.

In his translation Madhusudan largely kept close to the original, but

in his poem he relied on Vidyasagar. The poem begins at a point when Lakhman after leaving Sita in the forest, on the bank of the river Bhagirathi, returns home, and ends when the great rishi Valmiki takes her to the hermitage. This portion in Vidyasagar has been contained in two pages, or about 55 lines of prose. The account is mostly factual, and is presented in a racy narration, almost in a logical sequence of situations, beginning from Sita's sorrowful, helpless condition in the forest to her final rescue by the great rishi himself, through such information as he received from the youngsters of the hermitage. Madhusudan has kept the frame of events and has also stuck to the factuals. But in addition he has brought in an animated nature in sympathy with Sita's sorrows and in general, through his poetic touches, has developed an atmosphere of great sorrow and remorse. It would be quite exciting to balance both the pieces, Vidyasagar's and Madhusudan's. Both stand on their own merits and both the pieces excellently communicate what they have set out to do. But probably Madhusudan's would not have been what it is without the golden touch of Vidyasagar.

The comparison can be extended to two more pieces, a prose piece by Vidyasagar, entitled *Ramer Rajyavisek*, and a poem by Madhusudan, entitled *Sriram Banabasa*. Vidyasagar's is an incomplete piece. It begins with Dasarath's desires to instal Ram as King, the consultations thereto, and the final decision leading to all the exuberant welcome to the decision by the people of Ayodhya. Madhusudan began where Vidyasagar left. The decision has been profusely welcomed by the people who celebrate it. But all on a sudden the clouds gather, the sun before fully risen, eclipsed, and the whole city gets immersed in great sorrow leading to Ram taking farewell and finally leaving Ayodhya with his wife and brother, clad in barks of trees. Vidyasagar's piece was published in 1869, Madhusudan's in 1893. One wonders if there is any connection - thematic continuity is obvious, in spite of differences in form and treatment. But the last paragraph of Vidyasagar's piece and the first four stanzas of Madhusudan's poem are in a way interlinked, as they describe, almost in identical terms, of the general atmosphere of happiness and celebration at Ayodhya.

There are other areas too, where it would be exciting to explore this link. Both Vidyasagar and Madhusudan were committed persons,

committed to improve manners, morals, and the qualities of education in general, and both knew very well that the foundation of a man's character is always laid at a very young age, and nothing can do it better than the early school books, if they are planned and executed properly. Vidyasagar's famous primer **Barna Parichaya** (both parts, published. 1857) has many virtues, such as its excellent organization, equally excellent lesson-arrangements, choice of topics, and a unique style which is conventional on the one hand, and precise and disciplined on the other (a far cry from the style of **Sakuntala** or **Bharantibilas**). But its most outspoken virtue is probably the way the lessons have been organized to promote one most important aim, that is, how to build the character of young people. There are direct instructions, such as, "Always speak the truth", "Never disobey your parents", "Never use bad words to others", "Whatever you read daily, practice daily" etc. Then, secondly, correct habit is implied in the course of a day's action, such as in Part–I, 14 Lesson – "The night is over. It's dawn. Don't sleep any more. Get up, wash your mouth, put on your clothes. Then sit down to read.." etc. Then differently, as in Part–II, in the lessons 4,5,6 and 7, through four portraits of four young lads he points out which parts of habits, manners and characters are to be promoted in preference to which others – model habits no doubt, but which if practiced, go to develop a boy into a wholesome human being. All those apply to Madhusudan also. He composed three Primers, **Sisubodha**, **Barnabodha** and **Balabodha**, together published under the title **Barnabodha** (1895), which came to be the most famous primer in Oriya, and completely dominated the early school curriculum in Orissa till almost Independence. It was modelled on Vidyasagar's book, both in its structural arrangements as well as in matters of style in evolving a colloquial, disciplined language, though it had aspects of poetic excellence which were not so much present in Vidyasagar. As in Vidyasagar's case, so also in Madhusudan's, generations of students through decades, learnt to live through it both linguistically, as well as aesthetically and morally.

One wonders at the extent of involvement of both, in habits, manners and character-building of the youngsters. Thus Vidyasagar's **Nitibodha** was published in 1851. It was brief, and as Vidyasagar himself admitted, it was based on the 'Moral Class Book' of Robert and William Chambers.

It contained prose lessons such as, (1) How to treat the animals, (2) How to behave with the family members, (3) Hard work, (4) One's own thoughts and self-dependence, (5) Humility etc. Thus this is how he addresses with respect to one's duties towards the members of the family - "We should always have sympathy and good will towards our fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters etc. Just remember when we were children and completely helpless, it was they, the parents, who bedded us, clothed us, and made us into men. What amount of care, labour and suffering they did put up for us ! If they would not have that concern and love for us we would have been dead long since" etc. Madhusudan's *Nitiratnamālā*, *Drustāntamala* and *Manimala* together containing 213 lines were very close to Vidyasagar in spirit – the aim being similar, to promote good manners, good behaviour, and strong moral aptitudes in children.

Vidyasagar's influence on Madhusudan Rao's **Barnabodh** or the Oriya Primer, was indirect. But Vidyasagar's book on Sanskrit grammar, entitled **Byakaran Kaumidi**, became a classic school–text in Orissa's schools, and that for many years. In addition, Oriya grammar books written in the later 19th and early 20th, were largely modelled on Vidyasagar's book. The trend continued almost till Independence, to the extent that even today the popular Oriya grammar books, such as, to name one, **Sarbasar Byakarana**, show unmistakable links with Vidyasagar's book.

Vidyasagar's influence on Oriya literature has always been a potent one. Even at a time when Oriya intelligentsia were highly critical of continuous Bengali interference in Orissa's socio–cultural areas (this particularly happened in the last quarter of the 19th century when it was spearheaded by the agitation of some Bengalees to abolish Oriya language) Vidyasagar was much admired and respected. Thus Madhusudan Rao could think it fit to write an essay on him as an ideal person, to be included in his famous text-books for schools, and for many important writers (even including Radhanath Ray) Vidyasagar's prose-style was taken as a standard style of writing to be followed and adapted. Vidyasagar's link with Oriya literature has been both meaningful and fruitful, and viewed in a perspective, his links with Madhusudan in particular, has been rewarding for Oriya literature and literary–education as a whole.

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13
GOPINATH MOHANTY NOVELIST

Gopinath Mohanty was born on April 20, 1914, in his parental house, in the village Nagabali, about 10 kms. downstream from Cuttack city, on the bank of the river Sidhua, the continuation of river Kathajodi that flows by Cuttack city, and died on August 20, 1991, in his daughter's house, at San Jose, on the western Pacific coast of America, about 15000 kms. away from his native place. When he was born his father was about 50, mother 44, and he being the ninth child, and the family being in great distress, "nobody would have prayed for my coming", he recollects gleefully. Yet he was much loved by his parents, and by everybody else, more than they loved others. When he died, a greatly-loved person, a splendidly vibrant personality, it was most unwelcome, most unexpected, a stunning calamity, a void not to be filled up for many many years to come in Oriya literature.

About 53 years later, while writing his autobiography, Gopinath recreates his time of birth – "The eleventh day of Vaisakha, dry, barren, dusted by a blast of wind from dry river sands ; dark fortnight ; dense dark night. The dacoits were out, and to frighten the villagers, were throwing stones through darkness across the river bank. They had their 'camp' under the darkness of a huge, spreading Kochila tree that had extended over an acre of land at a distance of about 100 yards, towards the river on the river slope. And the village dogs, those Valua, Tipu, Kalia, Budhia etc., 53 years ago, kept up their chorus of protest in unison from their safe corners under the houses. All on a sudden the jackals howled, across the river bank, from the river side, around the funeral ground, from the east, west, south, and the dogs joined the music. As if the Vedic chants and the prayer in the mosques now joined with the tolling of the church bells, so vast, so together. The moment came, I was born." It is all over, he concludes. May be. But the intense creative imagination, subtle wit and humour, an implicit joyous abandon, and a

capacity to accommodate different faith and the ways of living in one's own being, were what characterized Gopinath throughout his life, and the best of what he wrote.

Though fallen to bad days when Gopinath was born, the family had a legendary origin, the ancestry being traced to a royal family that ruled near Bhubaneswar, sometime in the early part of the 18th century, from where in consequence of a quarrel with the king of Khordha, Gopinath's great great grandfather, Dharmu Mohanty, shifted to Nagabali in the early part of the 19th century, and settled there. He was a man of many parts, and a great upholder of ancient traditions and rich heritage of the nation, and succeeded in providing an identity to his ancient family in the new place. A really illustrious person was his grandson, Nabin, the grandfather of Gopinath. He bought extensive land, to the extent of including parts of the then Cuttack town within his zamindary, and raised and supported a large joint-family of more than 100 people. He was keenly aware of the new ways that had come to Orissa due to the new British administration, and not only he himself participated in the newly started construction works, but also initiated his family members into it. Thus Gopinath's father and uncles, as also many others became engineers and they worked in different parts of Bihar and Orissa. One uncle particularly, Dibyasingh Mohanty, who died untimely in Patna in 1913, and from whom, it is said, the author inherited many qualities, was probably the first Executive Engineer of Orissa. As the family took to new ways of living, the ancient agricultural aristocracy decayed, and by 1914 the reputation of the family was more in name than in reality. Gopinath refers to this in his autobiography – "Then suddenly the structure of family changed. They all took to jobs, stayed out. The father, the elder uncle, Jagu uncle, Jai uncle, all became overseers or took up jobs of similar nature. The house got empty, the property got ruined. Those who stayed in the village could not look after it, could not maintain it ; the houses fell, the thatches sank, the plasters peeled off from the walls." The author recollects how one night when he was 7, he saw his mother crying, because the last piece of zamindari had been sold away. In the account of Sindhu Choudhury's house in **Matimatala** (the Jnanpith Award winning novel) which strongly reminds of Gopinath's house at Nagabali, we get a glimpse of this ruined aristocracy of which only a

decorated, sculptured facade remains.

Gopinath's father was Suryamani Mohanty. He died on July 1, 1926, when the author was 12. He was a remarkable person who had powerfully shaped his son's character and attitude to life, though calculating in terms of impressionable years, it was for less than 7 years that Gopinath really stayed in the company of his father. **Matimatala** is dedicated to his memory in these words – "To my father, who attained knowledge about God, who realized divine grace through austere religious practices my Guru, whom above everybody else I respect and revere ....." Gopinath's capacity to perceive life in all things is due to his father's influence, who could anticipate events, could talk to animals, birds and trees, and knew in advance the exact date and hour of his death. So too about his mother, an extremely loving soul, of whom Gopinath speaks only in ecstatic terms – "She who brought me to this world from her body, protected me inside her lap with her life till she passed away, what is she to me, how do I look at her, I have no language to speak... She was not only my mother, she was the source of my life's sustenance, my home, my shelter. The language in which I think, speak, write, it is her's. She shaped my mind, taught me alphabets, gave me to understand what is good and what else is bad."

Gopinath left his village in August, 1923. That was almost like a final leave-taking, because after that he had gone back to his village after long intervals, and that too, for casual visits, though during his long service career he had visited many other villages of Orissa, and had first hand acquaintance with them. But the childhood years that he spent in the intimate surrounding of his own and neighbouring villages left permanent impression on his mind. He was drunk with the 'quiet, cool beauty of the countryside', Gopinath admits, and it provided a wonderful structure to his stories, novels and even essays – almost like a living being, as in **Matimatala**, and the richest source of his creative strength. At that time Nagabali was famous for its folk–songs and folk–operas and in his family among his uncles and cousins he had a number of persons who sang, danced, acted and wrote plays and songs. In fact Gopinath grew up in the midst of a rich traditional culture and he imbibed many of its features in his own writings. He recalls all that in a graphic account in his autobiography – "Nagabali, River bank, River sands,

Two tall deodar trees on the bank. A sprawling Kochila tree. An ancient banyan tree. Coconut trees. The village road like a tunnel, houses, animals, birds, insects, smoke rising from the thatch, lotus in the pond, festivals round the year, operas, religious soirees, the villagers, the village community......" Yet another gain of Gopinath at this time was his acquisition of a rich stock of idiomatic and colloquial language which he picked up from his parents and elder persons as well as from his co–villagers. No doubt he had gone on adding to this stock subsequently. But what he originally received during his childhood years contributed largely to that excellent idiomatic life in his works and which remains almost unique and unsurpassed in the whole range of modern Oriya literature.

Gopinath's first schooling was at Sonepur, an ex–State, in the Sonepur Maharaja High School, where his father went for the second time, in August, 1923, and took Gopinath along with him. It was like a second home for his father, where earlier he had stayed for about 30 years, in employment with the king, and where most of his children except Gopinath were born. Sonepur in those days was a fine, picturesque town on the confluence of the Mahanadi and Tel, full of ancient temples and exciting old legends. Gopinath was enrolled in class VI, and stayed at Sonepur till June 1926, when he shifted to Patna (Bihar) again in company of his father. Gopinath was enrolled in Patna High School, in class VIII, and stayed in his brother's house at Patna till March, 1930, when after completing Matriculation, he finally shifted to Cuttack. The 'country–boy' Gopinath was much impressed by Patna city, though his initial feelings were of great diffidence – " I had come from a gadjat school in the middle of the school session, to a school where the students numbered three or four times more, and many of them were very good students from famous schools. Then this school had different books, different syllabus, and about three–fourth of the course was already finished. The medium was English and Bengali and Hindi, the teachers were Bengali and Hindi speaking, students too. I had to begin everything anew, and I didn't have a single book. Added to it, I was only 12, I had just lost my father, wherever I looked I got a pinching feeling – the father was no more, the mother cried all the time and a great sorrow was at home. There was want everywhere. The mind was shrunken,

frightened, full of agony". Yet Gopinath could succeed, and stood first in the annual examinations of class VIII, and subsequently stood second in the Matriculation in the Patna University. Gopinath's academic success continued even after that. He joined Ravenshaw College at Cuttack, from where he passed his M.A. in English, in 1936, standing first in Patna University. He wanted to join I.C.S., or alternatively to get a Professorship in the college. He could not pursue his studies for I.C.S. due to financial difficulties and could not get a Professorship because there was no vacancy. He joined Orissa Administrative Service (Junior) in 1938, on a salary of Rs. 100/- p.m. On May 30, 1940, he married Adarmoni Devi, to whom he has dedicated his Sahitya Academi Award winning novel **Amrutar Santān.**

The period from 1930 to 1938, when Gopinath stayed at Cuttack, was almost a formative period for him. There were three major influences on him – two came from the West, Freud on the one hand, and Marx and Russian Revolution on the other. The other influence was from inside the country – Mahatma Gandhi and the nationalist movement. In addition, all his contact with English thought and literature shaped him as a liberal humanist. He read avidly, a habit that had continued with him from his early school days, and often went beyond the routine studies in the college, his two special favourites being Romain Rolland and Gorky. Cuttack at that time was a middle–range town with a lot of open space and people lived there in cordial relationship with each other. Gopinath with his sociability, creative talent and scholarship easily made a mark in the town. He recollects those years as a continuous search for self-identity through Western literature. He had deep roots in Oriya tradition and in Oriya idiomatic and colloquial life. These were now nourished by Western classics and Western approach to life. The first fruits of this synthesis could be seen, interestingly, in the literary essays that he wrote for contemporary Oriya journals in 1936, (**Kalāsakti**, Power of Art, published 1973). The essays grew structurally in the context of Oriya rural life, and the quiet mysteries of Oriya countryside. But at the same time they incorporated points of view which were familiar only to readers of Western literature.

In fact Gopinath began to write seriously from 1936 onwards, and his first novel **Managahirar Chasa** (Tilling of the Mind's Soil) was

completed by 1938. During his service-career Gopinath was posted in different parts of Orissa including a number of years in the southern tribal districts. All through he maintained an independent spirit, almost like that of his father, openly advocated the cause of the poor, downtrodden and the tribals, and never compromised with injustice. This, coupled with his reputation as a writer, adversely affected his career. He recollects how at one time, the then Chief Secretary of Orissa advised him to give up writing. Fortunately he did not do so. But the result was he was given a class I after 24 years of service, and when he retired in 1969, it was on a salary of Rs. 1,080/– p.m. The following is an extract from a petition which was sent against him to Prime Minister Nehru in January, 1953, by the land–owners and money-lenders of Koraput where he was posted as a Special Assistant Agent combining the powers of S.D.O. and Subjudge under Agency rules – "To our great calamity and disaster Sri Gopinath Mohanty is posted here as the special assistant agent at Rayagada. He is always fond of hillmen and behaves like hillmen himself. He very little respects other classes of people before them. He behaves as if only born for Adivasis"..... When asked, Gopinath tries to laugh it away. He was like his father who gloried more in woe. The magic of his extremely animated personality was such that it never gave one a thread of suspicion that he ever was affected by adverse situations. It was like that on the day he retired from service, when next morning, with a spotlessly white dhoti and panjabi and with a pipe in mouth, and with children around him, he drove his new fiat to Kausalyaganga, the lake outside Bhubaneswar, to angle and catch fish. It was so too, even 10 days before his death, when he rang up his eldest son from California, boomed his plans for the coming two to three years, and asked him to send his diary, Kondh flute, and unfinished manuscripts to be finished and completed. A man whom nothing touched, yet who lived fully and fiercely – that was Gopinath, who was a living legend so long he lived, and whose works provided one of the greatest documentation of the creative spirit in the tortured times we live.

Subsequent to **Managahirar Chasa**, a psychological novel, that was published in 1940, 22 of Gopinath's novels were published, and 8 story-collections in addition to plays, poems, biographies, critical essays, translations from Bengali, Hindi, English including a book like Tolstoy's

War and Peace as well as a number of books on tribal languages and culture. Posthumously 4 more story–collections, two novels and his autobiography have been published. "I never knew that one day I would be a writer", said Gopinath. Yet writing was in his blood, in the family. His elder brother Kanhucharan, and his nephew Guruprasad both received in addition to himself, the Sahitya Akademi Awards in novel and poetry respectively. Since 1936, he almost made it a habit to write daily and never stopped till the hour of his death.

Gopinath's fictions can be divided into three main groups. The earliest group corresponds to his early service–period when he was posted in the tribal district of Koraput. The novels are, **Dādibudha** (The Old Uncle, 1944), Paraja (The Parajas, 1945), **Amrutar Santan** (The Immortal Sons, 1947), **Siba Bhai** (The Brother Siba, 1955) and **Apahancha** (The Unattainable, 1961). They deal with the tribals. The second group deals with people living in the towns. There are variations, and the writer has spoken of different groups and categories, as well as individuals, and of high and low caste, and educated and uneducated etc. But generally, these novels, in themes and scope as well as in characters they portray and in attitudes, operate within the limits of the town. These are **Harijana** (The Harijanas, 1948), **Sarat Babunka Gali** (Sarat Babu's Lane, 1950), **Rāhura Chhāyā** (The Shadow of Rahu, 1950), **Sapana Māti** (The Dream Soil, 1954), **Danapani** (Bread and Water, 1955), **Laya Bilaya** (The End of an Aim, 1961), **Analanala** (The Destructive Fire, 1973), **Diga Dihudi** (The Blaze of Direction, 1979), and **Bundāe Pāni** (A Drop of Water, 1988) etc. The last group is really one novel – **Māti Matāla** (Clay, 1964) which is an epic of Oriya village life. It is interesting to note that Gopinath's three major novels (both in size and quality) that is, **Paraja**, **Amrutar Santan** and **Matimatala** deal with the tribals and the village–folk, the people, who have intimate links with the soil. The 'town–novels' though they constitute the majority, are a shade lower than the above three. Among them **Harijana**, **Danapani**, **Layabilaya** and **Bundae Pani** (incidentally an almost autobiographical novel) stand out as better than the rest. The stories too, generally follow these broad divisions. But as they are inevitably brief and precise, they manifest greater complications where the narrative structures range from detached, objective studies of situations to strong, powerful expressions of individual reactions and

emotions. But everywhere, always, whether it is in fictions or in stories, or even in a biography or the autobiography, what dominates is the voice - the voice of the writer, who sees and knows, who is intensely involved and yet completely detached, an outsider, who is aware of changing, difficult times when the cultures clash and fade out, and whose insight goes beyond the appearances into the nakedness of reality and existence.

Gopinath's greatest and most difficult work is **Matimatala**, which he took about 10 years to complete. Never before a novel of equal magnitude and beauty was written in Oriya, and never too, one came across a novel which was so much rooted in the soil, as this one was. Interestingly it has the barest outline of a story, and the two major characters, the hero and the heroine, incidentally who have the most commonplace names, Rabi and Chhabi, are presented with a remarkable reticence, having no relationship between the two, except at a subtle mental level. The novel begins when Rabi, who has just passed his B.A., leaves his village and goes to the town to take up a job. On the way as he stays with a friend for the night, he decides against taking up a job, and returns to the village. His father, a local Zamindar, does not approve this. But Rabi sticks to his own decision, stays in the village, and the rest of the novel deals with his continuous attempts at organizing how best the village life can be organized like the life in a family both in thought and deed. It is difficult to say how far he succeeds. In fact the novel ends in no resolution. But in the process the whole structure of Orissa's rural life, its originality, strength and changes and weaknesses are laid bare in a unique totality. One central situation in the novel is when Rabi confronts his father. The confrontation was on the issue of his marriage. Yet it takes the form of a clash between two generations, or more correctly between two sets of values, one tradition–bound and rigid, while the other takes the essence of tradition and at the same time, flexible. Apparently the father remains firm, but he loses in spirit and at the end he is seen as a part of natural life where old trees decay and new roots grow up. This is how the writer sums of the situation – "The world of wild refuse had deeply and tenderly appropriated him. A dry log lay ; trees stood around ; an old man was lying ..... lying fast asleep. As if he had existed all along like this, maintaining this equation

with his surroundings ; as if this was the natural function of his life. And like the drops of water dripping from the spring jar time dripped in drops through the empty spaces, continued to drip and kept flowing along." In a different vein the writer speaks of Agani Ray, the village tout – " He was dark, thin and tall and his gaunt face was smooth and was clean shaven because it was hairless from birth and his bald head was like a longish wood-apple fixed to a long iron–rod..... When he stares at anyone in the face from his hollow and sunken eyes, his fixed gaze seems to sear through and cling." The sketch is humorous yet it shows Agani Ray as a snake, a devil who operates in life. Still another aspect is the description of the flood which runs for about 150 pages in the novel and which is probably a unique such account in Indian literature. The floods bring devastation where man is seen as helpless and ugly - a naked, rotten corpse floating in water. On the other hand the floods provide opportunity for realizing finest human qualities such as compassion, tolerance and sacrifice. The real distinction of **Matimatala** lies in its profundity, in its nature of experiment on vision and in its quality of wisdom which emerges through innumerable details of light and shade as the basic factors of existence.

Gopinath's two great novels about the tribals, **Paraja** and **Amrutar Santan**, deal with the Parajas and the Kondhs respectively. They have the similar dimensions as in **Matimatala**, that is, working from the locale of a family and the village, they encompass the whole of tribal living and the dense mountainous nature of which it forms a part. In both, the human life is realized, first of all, in the context of tribal customs and taboos; secondly, as an organic part of nature where it is integrated as nature's natural; thirdly, in the complications of cultural-conflict where the tradition bound tribal culture comes under the corroding impact of the new culture from the plains; and lastly, in the universals of existence independent of any local facade or restraint. Evil is present, as elsewhere in Gopinath, so too, innocence and virtue, and both are equally operative. What decays on the one hand, as the inevitable victim of passing time, is nourished otherwise by man's determination, courage and strong desire to live.

Paraja was published in 1945, when Gopinath had just left Koraput after 5 years' stay there. The novel deals with the Parajas, a very poor

and small tribal group of the district of Koraput, having a population of about 6000. The details about the tribe emerge through an account of a small family, in a small Paraja village at some distance away from Koraput town. The family was caught by adverse situations again and again till finally it was completely ruined and the father and his two sons were arrested as murderers. This tale of woe is dramatically realised in the background of a rich external nature and is coupled with a sense of joy and hope seen generally in the tribe's character. **Amrutar Santan** published 2 years after, had a wider perspective and was more complex in structure. The emphasis is still on one family and the locale is one village. But as it deals with the Kondhs, a more ancient and more populous group having a philosophy of life of their own, the novel's structure has become contemplative and philosophic. The simple and lineal features of **Paraja** are now replaced by a complex organisation and shifting relationships which give a deeper and more intense experience of life. In a way this difference is seen in Jilli and Puyu, the heroines of the two novels respectively. Whereas Jilli was selfishly interested to satisfy her own desires, Puyu could sacrifice herself for the sake of the family and for the hope of a new life to come.

Gopinath's 'town-novels' have different motivations, depending on what he aims at. The distinguishing novels were **Harijana**, **Danapani** and **Layabilaya**, published respectively in 1948, 1955 and 1961. All these years except for a brief posting at Rayagada in Koraput district, he was either at Cuttack or Bhubaneswar or Puri. The novels of this period largely reflect his concern for the town and for all those who live in the town. The locale of **Harijana** is Cuttack, and of **Layabilaya** Puri, whereas in **Danapani** the town is generally present. **Harijan** deals with the Harijans who stay in dirty hovels, in a dirty part of the town. They are contrasted with the rich who exploit them and finally drive them out of the limits of the town. **Danapani** narrates the story of a man's rise to positions in the process of which he employs all means including the use of his wife's beauty and youth. In both the novels the writer takes out the so called civilised cover of the 'town–man' and shows him as he really is, mean, small and essentially a hypocrite. Thus Aghor in **Harijana** sleeps with his own step–sister and Sarojini in **Danapani** can commit adultery with impunity. These people lack nourishment (though they

are fully nourished physically) which comes only from a contact with the soil and the nature and in which sense the Parajas, the Kondhs, the village–folk in **Matimatala** and even the Harijans are fully nourished. The later theme is elaborated in **Layabilaya** where a couple and their grown-up daughter come from Calcutta to Puri for a short visit. The contact with the sea rejuvenates them and they feel nourished as they have never felt before. But this is only a brief experience. They have to go back finally into the lifelessness of the dry, drab city. The directing tone in the tribal novels was compassion, whereas in the town-novels it is sharp, biting irony.

It is amazing to trace the multiple patterns in Gopinath's novels and stories. As mentioned earlier, he has generally worked in three main areas. But within these limitations there are many factors which can be noted by an alert reader. For example, his response to nature, which provides a running structure in all his works. This nature is descriptive, at the same time it is creative, and in books like **Paraja**, **Amrutar Santan**, **Layabilaya** and **Matimatala**, it assumes a vital life of its own. Significantly, the writer's awareness of the social changes and the problems of the contemporary society provide another structural frame in his works. The forties, the fifties and the sixties, which constitute the major part of the writer's working period correspond to the pre–Independence period of preparation and the post-Independent era of planning and development. These have influenced the average man's life in many ways whether he is in the towns or in the villages or in the hills. A pertinent example is Bipin, the Development Officer in **Matimatala** who poses a viable alternative to the type of development work undertaken by Rabi. Still another recurrent structural frame is created in the author's continuous references to tradition or to the glorious past of the nation. Again it is seen to its best advantage in **Matimatala**. Probably the most powerful structural frame is provided by the use of language and again the best example is **Matimatala**. From this point of view it remains unique in modern Oriya literature and can only be compared with the use of language in Phakir Mohan Senapati's novels and stories in the early part of the 20th century. The language is creative and perceptive and its idiomatic life is so vital that it becomes an organic part of the experiences it communicates.

"I have faith in man, and in his ultimate victory and liberation", said Gopinath in his acceptance speech while receiving the Jnaṇpith Award(1974), "cold and dispassionate reasoning may reduce man in terms of his sense-worlds to nothing ; but there yet remains the spark of life in him, and when he is not this and not that, he is still the good and eternal. I have faith that the world will yet be one home, bound together by love, mutual acceptance and care for each other where the individual will be assured his fullest development and will fit harmoniously into society". That was Gopinath's distinction – a complete man, a compassionate spirit, a person of great wisdom and sanity, a truant boy from Nagabali who rose to acquire the vision of the liberated humanity, an achievement realized by very few in the modern world.

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14
SACHI ROUTRAY POET

Sachi Routray or Satchidananda Routray was born in 1913, at a place called Gurujangh, in Khurda, about 30 kms from Bhubaneswar, on Bhubaneswar- Madras National Highway. His family was affluent and well-known, and his father Prasanna Kumar Routray, an advocate in Khurda court, was an important Congress leader of the time. He read in Khurda High School, subsequently shifted to Jajpur, Puri and Calcutta, till he finally came to Cuttack, from where he obtained his B.A. degree in 1939. Routray's student career was a disturbed one as he often participated in the contemporary struggle for freedom for which he was also victimized from time to time, to the extent that he was not permitted to continue his studies further after B.A. In 1942 Routray took up a job in Calcutta, as the Chief Labour Welfare Officer in Kesoram Cotton Mills, where he continued for 20 years, till 1962, rising to become the Mill's Executive Officer, and also at times, Factory Manager. He returned to Cuttack in 1962 where he settled with his wife and four children.

Routray's earliest poems were written while he was in the school, at the age of 12, and his first poetry book entitled **Patheya** (For the Road) was published in 1931. The book was dedicated to 'young traveller' and contained 52 sequences conveying 'mellifluous experiences' concerning love, nature, and general dissatisfaction against the prevailing social injustice and inequalities. Routray was frequently writing in contemporary journals. Between 1931 and 1934, he wrote a group of poems dealing with nature and rural life, which were later collected as **Pallisree** (Rural Graces, first edition, 1941). The poems became greatly popular, and even at that young age, established Routray's reputation as a competent poet. In 1935, when he was a student in Calcutta, his first and only novel was published. It was entitled **Chitragreeba**, and it was a satirically humorous picture of Calcutta's intelligentsia. But Routray's main forte was poetry, and his next volume of poetry was published in 1938, from Cuttack. It was entitled **Abhijān** (The Invasion) and contained

a number of poems with contemporary socialist and Marxist attitudes. The same year Routray participated in the agitation for freedom struggle in the feudatory States of Orissa and wrote his famous poem **Bāji Rout** (First edition, 1938) on the death of a young boatman–boy, who became a martyr for the cause of Independence, when he was shot dead, it is said, by the soldiers of the then king of Dhenkanal. The poem inspired the young generation of fighters and rapidly extended the reputation of Routray as a fine progressive poet.

The forties were an important time for Routray. He wrote rapidly and almost continuously, and by the end of the forties, he came to be recognized as a major poetic voice in Oriya literature. The poetical volumes, in addition to **Baji Rout,** that were published during this period were **Pāndulipi** (The Manuscript, 1947), **Abhijnān** (The Signet, 1948), **Hasant** (Towards Laughter, 1948), and **Bhānumatira Desa** (The Land of Bhanumati, 1949). Of these, **Pandulipi** containing about 65 poems, was most substantial, and expressed a clear direction towards a new taste and sensibility other than 'romantic' or 'progressive', in the post-Independence Oriya literature. Routray wrote stories, too, largely of a socio-psychological type, during this period, and these were collected in 3 volumes entitled **Masānira Phula** (The Flowers of the Cremation Ground, 1948), **Mātira Tāj** (The Crown of the Earth, 1948) and **Chhai** (The Shadow, 1949). Most of his major poetic volumes in the new mode got published during the fifties, the sixties and the seventies. They were **Swāgat** (Soliloquy, 1958), **Kabita–1962** (Poetry–1962, 1962), **Kabita–1969** (Poetry–1969, 1969), **Kabita–1971** (Poetry–1971, 1972) and **Kabita–1974** (Poetry–1974, 1975). The five volumes together contained about 270 poems, many of which particularly, exhibited a keen sensitiveness to a spoken, conversational rhythm, and showed the poet's capacity to use colloquial idioms at ease. Subsequently there have been more volumes of poetry. Besides, the poet's theoretical discussions on Marxist poetry as well as on new poetry as related to Oriya literature, have been collected in a few volumes.

Looking at Routray's poetry as a whole (because it is in poetry where he is best assessed and accepted), a total creative period of more then half a century, is by itself a remarkable feat. Thus the roots that grew in the early thirties continued to nourish a rich flowering till almost the

end of the seventies, and in the process generations of Oriya poets have been nourished and sustained at different levels. Though Routray's is not the most important poetic voice today in Oriya, yet his contribution to the rich poetic-crop in Oriya, particularly after Independence, is of great significance. The most interesting aspect of Routray's poetry lies in its manifold directions. At least three distinct areas can be seen in his poetry. The first, and probably the earliest, relates to his association with Marxist ideas of contemporary Europe. It dates back to mid-thirties, when some politically left-oriented writers of Orissa, who called themselves 'progressive', combined together to form an association called 'Nabajuga Sahitya Sansad' (The New Age Literary Association) with the declared aim of making literature an agent of 'revolution' and social change. Routray was an important member of this group, and many of the poems that he wrote at this time, and even later, such as *Sramika Kabi* (The Labourer Poet). *Sarbahara* (The Proletariat). *Spen* (Spain), *Biplabara Janmadine* (On the Birthday of Revolution), *Nal November* (The Red November), *Prabhatpherira Gan* (The Song in the Morning), *Barlin* (Berlin), *Hitlar* (Hitler) and *Koria* (Korea) etc. reflect the poet's preoccupation with the 'progressive' ideas. The known poem of this mode was **Baji Rout**, a poem in five sequences and in about 1,000 lines, which expresses the poet's sorrow and sympathy for the boy who was killed, and great anger against those who had killed him. But basically the poem celebrates the undying human soul that triumphs over gloom and destruction, only to rise into a new life of universal hope and liberty. The poem begins with the proclamation :

> No, it's not a funeral pyre,
> It's an undying flame in darkness,
> It's not to burn by itself
> But to burn others in a holocaust.

and goes to moan about the 'loss',

> Oh, what a disobedient boy !
> He didn't care for guns, kings and storms,
> Left all his games in dust,
> And smilingly served his life
> before the bullet.

to end finally with an assurance,

He gives confidence in victory,
Hope in defeat,
He is not yours alone, Oh mother,
He is the world's thirst and desire.

The second area in Routray's poetry relates to such poems as are predominantly romantic in tone and structure. Though, a romantic reaction to love, beauty and nature can be seen throughout Routray's poetic career, yet like the 'progressive' poems they can be dated back to the thirties and to the influence of another poetry–movement, called 'Sabuja Andolan' or the Green movement. Though Routray was not involved with this movement as he was with the 'progressive' one, yet in general approach and understanding, many of his poems showed a close resemblance with the poems of this movement. A number of poems in **Patheya**, **Abhijan**, **Abhijnan**, and **Pandulipi** etc. testify to this trend. Even laterly, when Routray's poetic mode has changed, one can perceive romantic taste and sensibility in the total poetic structure. The two poetical volumes that may be particularly noted in this connection are **Pallisree** and **Bhanumatira Desa**. The former has a single theme, that is, to project beautifully the unitary and yet socially contradictory personality of Orissa's villages. On the one hand, there is joy, pleasure and happiness in contemplating the beauties of the village and the innocent customs of the village people ; on the other, there is sorrow and melancholy reflecting the exploitation of the rich at the expense of the village-poor. The first poem, entitled *Chhota Mora Gaanti* (Small is My Village), a very popular poem, sums up the poet's indebtedness to the village in a romantic vein :

Its water as blood
Flows in my nerves;
Its air as breath
Steers my life;
Its flowers and green creepers
Give speech to my tongue;
And its dawn in the month of Phaguna
Gives new look to my eyes–
Its streams made me a poet
And drowned me in the waves of dreams.

Bhanumatira Desa also deals with nature, but it combines nature with love in an intimate proximity. There is love in its physical aspect and also at the same time as a mental attitude. The lover 'belongs' to nature, and himself becomes a part of its naturalness. The lady-love comes from outside, from the town, and sees nature as a part of temporary relaxation, but otherwise as a place of horror. The atmosphere conjures up feelings of dream and remoteness and the love grows through a sense of longing and melancholy. The land of Bhanumati ('Bhanumatira Desa') is the symbol of both fruition and failure, and shows Routray's romantic sensibility at its best.

The third area of Routray's poetry began, in fact, after Independence, when the attitude of Oriya poets shifted from emotions of progressive patriotism, nationalism and social equality on the one hand and feelings of love and nature on the other, to a contemplation of man's condition in a hostile, uncomprehending world. The taste as well as the sensibility were fast changing and Routray's poetry not only reflected the change but also helped to formulate the new attitudes in a significant way. A few poems from **Pandulipi**, but more poems from **Swagat**, **Kabita-1962**, and from subsequent volumes, testify to this new mode or the third area in Routray's poetry. Thus for example in *Pratima Nayak*, from **Pandulipi**, which is about a woman-acquaintance of the poet who has lost her health and beauty through social and family compulsions (during the Second World War), the poem moves quickly into a helpless pity only to be resolved ironically in the context of corroding time ("Pratima Nayak smiles/ And touch of cream on her lips/Laughter like khaki cloth on her face/And her eyes twinkle for night./Forests move quickly on either side/ And circles of stars move by silently.")

Similarly in another poem *Jyamiti* (Geometry) from the same volume, love, nature, and love's desires and nature's fruitfulness are merged in each other in a metaphysical compactness only to move towards a final suggestion of loss and emptiness. These emotions continue in a poem entitled *Eka Bandhabira Janmadinare* (On the Occasion of a Lady-Friend's Birthday) from **Swagat** - the feelings of burning and destruction in an alienated self:

> You, an iron-dove,
> Heated by the intense heat of tropics,

And I, an empty sky,
All alone–burning.
I have no shadows,
I only heated you –
Your steel body, your metal cheeks,
With my volcanic blast;
And in great holocaust,
I burn alone–always, internally.

In *Smrutilekha* (A Memory) from **Kabita–1962**, the reference to a letter is used as a stepping-stone to explore layers of experience in time and space. As the associations range from Kalidas's Dasarna to Calcutta's Chowringhee and to Australia's Melbourne, one moves from a sense of intense physical pleasure ("Her touch/The smell of her body/And liquefactions of her pleasure") to a startling perception of tranquil happiness where Dasarna and Melbourne become one ("I remember/ Far away/In the dense shades of ripe black-berries/My Dasarna/My village/My Melbourne/My dearest city").

Even things like a lady's hairpin or a scooter have let the poet to explore deeper layers of experience and understanding. The poem *Hairpin* (from **Kabita-1971**) begins with a search for a lost hairpin everywhere in the house ("I can't find it/Where is your hairpin ?"). The search slowly extends to other areas, such as, distant hotels, river-banks and 'sea-beach', obviously the places the protagonist might have visited along with the lady. But then there are other different areas too, less substantial and countable, such as, 'layers of darkness', in the 'intensity of moon-shine', and 'climbing steps of time'- far and near, in the remote past and distant future. Finally, the hairpin becomes the symbol of youthful life ("Your tresses, beautiful and compact/And the domes of your breast") and its loss leads to a shocking vision of nakedness, emptiness and death. Similarly the poem *Lal Skutar* (Red Scooter, also from **Kabita-1971**) begins dramatically with reference to the movement of a scooter. But it is not alone in the familiar city-streets that the scooter moves through. On the other hand it races headlong over emptiness, towards a bottomless abyss, where all things sink and die. It is also a movement in time, where the past is compounded with the present and the scooter moves along the familiar city-streets in pursuit of a fixed

course of action, such as going on a picnic ("There are food and drinks/ And packets of sandwiches/And a tourist map/And a list of inns"). Yet at a different level, the movement is from non-being to being, from that which is less vital to that else which is more vital, and the point of annihilation becomes the final point of realization. ("The sound rises from emptiness/And the scooter races from nonbeing to being/ Tangentially/Under the blue cities"). Still differently, probably there is no movement, the scooter never moves ("Probably it has never moved/ Across the time's river"). Yet the existence involves action, and action leads to more action and finally to the final point of annihilation to where the protagonist is eager to come.

Routray's poetry is like a rich crop. Its abundance across decades is a point to note. Whether it is in romanticism or left-oriented 'progressivism', or in metaphysical compactness, it has always shown a keen awareness, both in language and imagination. He introduced free verse in Oriya and achieved a significant integration between the spoken and written languages and between the poetic and the conventional rhythms. His alertness for the language and his capacity to introduce newer and fresher images, again and again, brought a startling livingness to Oriya poetry in the forties and fifties. His has been a major voice, and his poetry has contributed, as pointed out earlier, very importantly to the rich mosaic of Oriya poetry after Independence.

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15
MANORANJAN DAS DRAMATIST

Manoranjan Das, the premier dramatist and chief exponent of New Drama in Orissa, was born in 1921, in the coastal district of Cuttack. At that time his father, professionally an engineer, was working as the local agent of Burdhwan Maharaja of Bengal in his zamindari at Kujang, very near to Paradeep and the sea. The whole area was sparsely populated, full of a wild coastal vegetation and had a fantastic, though awesome beauty. Manoranjan spent his young days there and at a later stage came to Cuttack, to complete his studies. These childhood impressions have never left him and they recur in his plays again and again as structural motifs. He completed his studies from Utkal University in 1946 and immediately took up a job in All India Radio as Sub-Editor, News. He left the job after 2 years, only to re-join AIR 10 years later in 1958, where he continued as Producer of Drama till 1973. At the request of the Government of Orissa he then joined as the Secretary of State Akademies (Orissa Sahitya Akademi, Orissa Sangeet Natak Akademi, and Orissa Lalitkala Akademi) which post he retained till 1980. In between he wrote 18 dramas, about 60 radio-plays, organised a number of amateur theatrical groups including 'Srujani', the most famous of all (1965-70), and produced innumerable plays, 2 films, and equally innumerable dance and music recitals, and talked almost everywhere in Orissa on drama, art and culture.

The most intense expression of Das's multifaceted and tremendously energetic personality is in drama, where his most distinguishing quality has been his capacity to respond to the continual change in taste and sensibility, particularly after Independence. Characteristically his first play, written while he ws a student in 1945, was entitled **Jauban** (The Youth) which depicted the dreams of a young man. But concurrently with Independence he quickly reacted to the changing political scene and in quick succession made four plays with political direction and vision. These were **August Na** (August 9), **Baxi Jagabandhu**, **Agami** (The Oncoming) and **Abarodha** (The Seize). They were pioneering plays

in the sense that never before in Orissa were the contemporary political themes seized upon as dramatic material with such force, determination and point of view. The plays among themselves present a whole gamut of political development beginning with the ambitious visions of **August Na** to the loss of confidence, helplessness and political failures of **Abarodha**. Of the four, probably the most interesting is **Baxi Jagabandhu** (which incidentally remains an extremely popular play even today) where in a historical–cum–patriotic context both the heroic hopes and stark reality of the defeated have been portrayed. In a sense it was a play suggestive of an atmosphere of political disillusionment which Das as a leftist shared with many of his friends at that time.

In fact the vision of **Abarodha**, a vision of defeat and loss, haunted Das for a long time. For about 10 years, from 1952 to 1962, it made him both physically and mentally restless. He wrote a number of one-act plays, but nothing to rival his group of pioneering powerful plays, though his involvement in the contemporary dramatic scene continued to be as energetic and vital as before. His AIR job as Drama Producer came as a part of this involvement which also incidentally institutionalised his activities to a large extent. But the real fruit of his involvement oame in the mid-sixties when in collaboration with Anant Mahapatra as Director he organised the Srujani, the most famous amateur theatre-group of Orissa, as well as the first pioneering group to stage bold, modern plays. Again in quick succession Das started writing plays : **Banahansi** (The Wild Swan, 1969), **Aranya Fasal** (The Wild Harvest, 1970), **Amrutasya Putra** (The Immortal Sons, 1972), **Kathaghoda** (The Wooden Horse, 1973), **Urmi** (The Waves, 1974) and **Sabdalipi** (The Word Script, 1976). This is a different group of plays in comparison to the first group. No longer does one see the social or political motivations. Instead attention is now fixed on the labyrinth of human predicament in modern times. In a way the vision of **Abarodha** was metamorphosed in these plays. But it assumed a more fundamental perception of life as regards communication, identity and existence. Three most powerful plays of this group, which also portray ascending steps in poetic understanding and vision are, **Aranya Fasal** which got Sahitya Akademi Award in 1972, **Kathaghoda** and **Sabdalipi**. In many respects these plays are unique in Oriya (for example in style, exposition etc). But together they constitute

the most important dramatic expression in Oriya of the modern sensibility of alienation and non-existence.

In **Aranya Fasal** five persons (three men and two women) have come to a remote dak-bungalow in the midst of a jungle on a week–end picnic. They are all city-bred and socially known to each other. They stay in the bungalow for two days and instead of achieving a deepening intimacy they slowly realise that they have never known each other enough, and there had never been any communication among them. The play deals with loss of communication and finally the characters are bogged down in themselves with no hope of rescue. Their conversation is reduced to monosyllables and they talk only to avoid each other. Going in search of big games they end up ironically in killing the pet–goat of the caretaker, and at the end one of them attempts to kill himself in contempt of the intimacy which they were trying to assume among themselves. It is a symbolic play with ironical overtones – irony at the futile attempts to combine and communicate.

In **Kathaghoda**, the second play of this group, a similar preoccupation continues, with this difference that whereas in **Aranya Fasal** Das looked to the West, particularly to the tradition of absurd plays, for his structure, in this play he incorporated the traditional Oriya folk opera so that the play proceeds through a familiar medium of dances and songs and has acquired a peculiar mass–appeal, which is strange when one considers its very sophisticated and modern theme : loss of identity. There are four characters (two men and two women) and one director who acts as the chorus and participates in the action. The characters are casually looking for a 'shelter'. As the play proceeds the rough edges of the characters wear off and the four characters slowly melt into two, a man and a woman, and ultimately into one, where the man-woman distinction vanishes. The identity lost we do not know where to turn to, or how best to comprehend a man's existence, or how to find the shelter or home which the characters were so frantically looking for. The director's attempt to provide some solid ground by way of developing the directions of destiny also fails as he himself participates in the action and in the total act of futility. Ironically the symbol is provided by the wooden horse of the title which only aspires to speed and life but neither achieves.

In **Sabdalipi**, the last play of the group, the perception of life is

deepest, almost philosophical. It proceeds normally, like any other social play of the time, with six characters, five men and one woman, with the director continually shaping and reshaping the actions to give an impression all the time that whatever is happening is all illusion. Whether at the beginning, the middle, or at the end, we do not know where we stand, though all the time the normal dramatic action continues (of characters communicating, making love, getting angry, leaving their houses or recollecting their past etc.). We immediately become conscious of something like a whirlwind in which all the five men circle round the woman, and only slowly, but with increasing intensity we become aware of another greater whirlwind in which all of them are caught, and which provides no fixed point anywhere, and where such segments of time, like life and death, become meaningless. The play moves from a point of existence to non-existence, and comprehends time as a flux where continually innumerable items of life bubble up only to vanish immediately after. The end of the play shows this most dramatically when the woman, called Rita, who was supposed to have been killed before, comes back to life once again, only to renew her actions as before. **Sabdalipi** is Das's most profound play and at the same time, along with **Aranya Fasal** and **Kathaghoda,** it remains a powerful creative document in post–Independence Oriya literature.

In fact, **Sabdalipi's** implicit contemplation of life added newer dimensions to Manoranjan's dramatic perception. The attention now shifted from sounding the depths of one's own psyche in an alienated world, to a consideration of sustaining values in a crumbling existence. This is apparent in **Bitarkita Apaṛānha** (Afternoon Cogitations, 1980) which portrays three generations, not so much as steps on a time scale, but as a conflict of attitudes. Thus whereas the grandfather sticks to his idol of God, and the father to his idol of Mammon, the grandson sticks to nothing - only to the ashes of the burning ground ; and at the end, the slokas from the Gita are juxtaposed with absurd sounds which are supposed to be a song from the youngsters.

Manoranjan continued the exploration of the theme and the attitudes of **Bitarkita Aparanha** in his, so far, the latest play, **Nandika Kesari** (1985). It related to the war for power and possession in a historical frame in the 12th century Orissa, and developed the dramatist's

perception of what constitutes the sustaining values of life. The story is a retelling of a popular historical tale about Nandika Kesari, the daughter of a 12th century king of Orissa, called Suvarna Kesari, of Kesari dynasty, whose capital was at Bidanasi, a part of the present Cuttack city. The kingdom was attacked by Sri Chodaganga Dev from the south (who subsequently established the Imperial Ganga dynasty in Orissa) who laid a seize of Bidanasi fort, and a fierce battle ensued. But Chodaganga could neither storm the castle nor win the war, because it was believed that Suvarna Kesari had divine protection in the form of a 'victory-jewel' which he always wore as a part of his head gear, and so long he wore it the fort remained invincible. Nandika, the daughter, fell in love with Chodaganga from a distance, and with a desire to help him, stole his father's 'victory-jewel' from his headgear, sneaked out of the castle at night, went to Chodaganga and offered the 'jewel' and herself to him. But Chodaganga did not accept Nandika, nor the 'jewel', and sent her back along with the 'jewel' to her father's castle. Nandika was heart-broken, and committed suicide on the way. When the king Suvarna Kesari came to know of it, he decided to end the battle, and abdicated the throne in favour of Chodaganga Dev.

Manoranjan kept the outline of the story, the sequence of events, but changed the motivation and purpose of action, and introduced new characters and attitudes to have a new frame. In his interpretation, Nandika, the princess, sacrificed her life as a challenge to man's greed and propensity to devastation, in favour of peace and tranquillity. Thus the 12th century incident transcended its time to symbolically become an encounter between man's goodness and his evil instincts. Nandika Kesari was a completely new drama in Manoranjan's dramatic oeuvre. He moved beyond socio–political as well as individual predicaments to a consideration of goodness and grace and to what extent they can be appropriate responses to modern man's conditions of living. Additionally, in incorporating Oriya folk–opera structure (including such aspects as dance, music and audience–participation) Manoranjan gave new dimensions to Oriya drama, and provided again a much needed new leadership to dramatic talents.

After 1985 Manoranjan has not written any serious drama, except occasional One-Acts. But he has written a remarkable book about himself

and about his own dramatic career – an extremely perceptive and integrated account of his own development as a creative writer. This book is his own autobiography, entitled **Smruti Samlap** (Dialogues in Memory), published in 1999 – a book almost at par with Gopinath Mohanty's unique autobiography **Srotaswoti**. It is both, a personal testament, as well as a graphic account of the post-Independence Oriya dramatic scene. Thus this is how he writes about the staging of **August Na** - "**August Na** was staged in Cuttack at Annapurna Pandal in the evening on August 11, in 1947. As per rules at that time it was necessary to take prior permission from the police. Though the British Government was to last for a few more days only, yet the police dilly-dallied to give the permission till the morning of the eleventh. But the hall had already been booked, the setting for the play was ready, and the invitation cards had already been distributed. For us it was an intolerable situation. We were firm to stage it, whatever the cost would be, permission or no permission.... There was no dearth of people in Cuttack who had experienced August agitation (of 1942) and had participated in it. It was fresh in their minds, and they had circulated the news of the play all over the town. The hall was packed even in the first night, and a lot of viewers who could not get seats stood all the while near the walls. The play began and ended in the midst of great excitement and loud clapping of hands. Even a large number of high officials and the police came to see the play." (pp.137)

Differently, the account of the first staging of **Aranya Fasal** (July 11, 1969) has a more personal note –" At last the curtain went up, and the play began. The characters came to the stage one after another. All noise in the auditorium stopped all on a sudden, As everywhere it became quiet, my heart rapidly palpitated. I sweated profusely, and prayed God, 'Let your will be done...'. I was in the middle row of the auditorium with a friend. When the play had continued for some time a viewer sitting nearby whispered to his friend : 'What is that talk going on on the stage ? Where is the play ?' His friend got irritated, and answered, 'Be quiet. That's the play going on. Don't you see how everybody is quiet ?' This conversation of two unknown people put life in my heart."

Manoranjan's single–minded devotion to drama, a continuous involvement for more than 60 years, and continual responses to changes

in taste and sensibility, is amazing. His capacity to provide significant dramatic expression to the problems of modern man, as well as his intense moral reactions to the conditions of modern living, are of singular relevance today and put him among the very best of Indian dramatists in the present time.

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16

K.C. SAHOO : CRITIC AND LITERARY HISTORIAN

Krushna Charan Sahoo (1930-1997) joined Ranchi College of Ranchi University in 1952, where he stayed till 1971 when he shifted to the Department of Oriya, Utkal University, in Bhubaneswar. He joined Utkal University as a Reader, where he subsequently rose to become Professor and Head of the Department, and continued till May, 1989, when he finally retired from service. Dr. Sahoo's entire career of about 37 years was spent in teaching and research, and when he retired, he came to be recognized as a most eminent literary critic and literary historian in Orissa. It was a life of dedication and intense involvement in literature, that has continuously pushed the frontiers of knowledge further and further. Even after retirement till his death in 1997 the flame of intelligence continued to illuminate as it had done earlier during the previous 37 years.

The first period till 1971 was mostly a period of intense preparation for Dr. Sahoo, when he read extensively into Oriya literature and the allied Indian literatures such as Hindi, Bengali and Assamese; collected a large number of rare palm-leaf manuscripts from all over Orissa and read them and transcribed them; translated the famous dictionary **Angrezi Hindi Kosa** by Father Bulcke, his mentor and teacher, into Oriya with suitable Oriya equivalents; and specialized in Rama Katha in Oriya, and single–handedly edited and prepared the definitive edition of **Jagamohan Ramayana**, the famous 16th century Oriya epic of Balaram Das. The last work was particularly amazing when one considers that Dr. Sahoo was doing his work on **Ramayana** all alone, without whatsoever any financial support from any source, and at a place very much away from the literary cultural centres of Orissa, more or less at a time when the corresponding work on Sarala Das's **Mahabharat** was being done with the financial support from the Govt., by Prof. Artaballav Mohanty, with a team of scholars, in Cuttack. The story has an irony in the sense that whereas Prof. Mohanty's edition of **Mahabharat** was

published by the Cultural Affairs Department of Orissa, Dr. Sahoo's edition of **Ramayana** was published much later, by himself. But Dr. Sahoo never thought of future benefits. He just worked, with a rare animating spirit, and when one recalls that after so many years, one is filled with awe and admiration.

Then there was the peculiar situation of a lone man in a lone Department in the whole of Bihar, as if it was a matter of indulgence than of real necessity. Added to that, there was the complete disregard of people who mattered inside Orissa - as if a lone Oriya Department in a place like Ranchi was more in the nature of a political consolation. If Dr. Sahoo could establish himself against these odds and provide the much needed leadership to the local Oriya culture, it was because of his complete involvement in academic pursuits. Nineteen years that he spent in Ranchi had a unique purposiveness, when, one may say, his ideal was his missionary supervisor and friend, Father Bulcke; and through quiet, dedicated work he conserved energy that was to come out at the opportune time and opportune place.

It happened in 1971, when Dr. Sahoo joined Utkal University. Of course his first book had been published while he was still in Ranchi. It was a collection of essays, in English, and was entitled **Literature and Social Life in Mediaeval Orissa** (1971). The book contained 11 essays, including five on Ramayana in Oriya and Balaram Das, two on Sarala Das, two on social customs and practices as seen in medieval Oriya literature, and one, interestingly, on the language spoken in Singhbhum, a border district in Bihar, where Oriya was spoken by many. In addition, the book contained two appendices, containing extracts translated into English from **Jagamohan Ramayana** as well as extracts from the **Mahabharat** of Sarala Das. The indications were clear. The book showed Dr. Sahoo's preferences, first of all for ancient Oriya literature, particularly for the strong Ramayana tradition; and secondly, towards an attempt to probe into the social milieu and ethos that go to provide essential structure to any literary work. Along with this one could also see the desire to give a wider publicity, particularly among non–Oriya speakers to the two great, ancient epics of Orissa, the two monumental works that shaped Oriya language and literature. The essays were written with lucidity, and provided a lot of information that were not

earlier available to scholars, even in Oriya. Besides they had an informing intelligence and insight, particularly as related to the portrayal of Oriya social life and habits both in Sarala and Balaram. Here is an interesting passage as related to the practice of bridal–procession at the time, which incidentally one may point out, continues even now in Orissan villages – "Then the bridegroom, well dressed and well adorned, went to the house of the bride, his friends and relatives accompanying him. He was required to go on a conveyance, suited to his status. Dance, music and chanting of sacred verses continued all the time by the *bhata* (orator), *nata* (dancer), *ganaka* (astrologer) and *ganika* (prostitute). Favourable omens like *rajahansa* (gander) and jars full of water, were kept on the way. The system of marriage procession is as old as the Rigveda and Atharvaveda. The poets of medieval Orissa have shown much inclination to describe a marriage procession. A number of *mashalas* (oil fed torches) are lighted and arranged on a bamboo ladder. Different kinds of *Vana* (fireworks) like 'champa', 'Jai', 'Jui', 'Chandra udia' and 'haveli' were made. These fire works filled the place with light, sound and smoke. The village women came in groups to see the bridegroom".

The account is functional but full of details. The tone is that of an observer who notes down every point impartially, but with a quiet pleasure at what he sees. Then there is the thrust of a scholar who tries to assess and analyze the scene. On the whole a remote picture is conjured up before the eyes of the readers whose participation is provoked. That was the beginning of Dr. Sahoo's ability and style. The second phase, of achievement, began in Bhubaneswar.

(ii)

Dr. Sahoo's first published critical work in Oriya, while in Bhubaneswar, was an extended discussion on **Rasakollol**, the famous kavya of Dinakrushna Das (17th–18th century) on Krishna Lila. It was entitled **Kahe Krushna Dās Kabi** (Thus Says Krushna Das the Poet, 1974) and it showed his critical maturity and analytical powers in unmistakable terms. Oriya critical tradition does not have a long history. Its serious beginning can be traced to the second / third decades of the century, and to such perceptive critics like Pandit Gopinath Nanda (1868–

1924) and Pandit Nilakantha Das. Subsequently it was enriched by Prof. Artaballava Mohanty (1887–1963) and Dr. Mayadhar Mansingh. Dr. Sahoo's book in the early seventies was a distinguished addition to this tradition. Apart from its merit, its distinction lay in another aspect. It was the first critical discussion on any important ancient Oriya kavya, and the first detail analysis of the creative achievement of Dinakrushna Das. On both accounts the book broke new grounds and showed new ways of appreciating ancient Oriya poetry.

The book was divided into 10 chapters. Beginning with the identification of the writer and the writer's place, the book goes on to deal with the themes and the arrangement of themes, the poetic craft, the language and style, imagery, approaches and attitudes, and the quality and nature of poetic imagination that motivated the poet and shaped his work: But such an important work like **Rasakollol** could not have been an isolated work of the creative mind, and that too when it was dealing with Krishna–Gopi–Radha theme. Hence its place in the Krushna Lila tradition was explored and the achievement was seen in a perspective, in the context of Oriya literature particularly, and Indian literature as a whole. Then the work was seen as a product of complex, contemporary social factors, and the subtle yet strong relationship between the society and literature, as evidenced in the book, was analyzed and formulated. On the whole **Kahe Krushna Das Kabi** projected the 18th century kavya as a modern creative document of vigour and power. An interesting example of Dr. Sahoo's analytical ability can be seen in his discussion of an apparently simple statement of the poet *ketebelare murkha nayak chata he* (sometime the flatterer of a foolish master) which he takes up as a metaphor, illustrating some unhappy aspects of the poet's life. This is how he writes : "The second image that illustrates the poet's life is *murkha nayak chata*. In **Kallol Kaumudi** the meaning of 'nayak' as master and 'chata' as servant has been accepted. If 'nayak' or the man who should be tolerant is a fool then the juniors or the servants have to tolerate a great deal of insult. Added to it, if the servant is virtuous and his virtues are ignored, it only increases his sorrow. May be Dinakrushna was such a virtuous servant and the master under whose protection he lived was a fool - *murkha nayak*. 'Nayak' and 'chata' have also other meanings in Oriya. The usually accepted meaning of 'chata' is a student,

from where we get 'chatasali', the school. 'Nayak' similarly means 'nahak', that is, the teacher. Hence if a teacher is illiterate or half educated ('murkha') the student's education remains incomplete. Then another meaning of 'chata' is irregular soldier. Those people who were recruited irregularly, on special occasions, to fight, were called 'chata'. From the inscriptions we find that one of the important positions in the army was 'nayak'. It is obvious that these irregulars cannot be better trained in military matters than the regulars, called *bhatta*. These irregulars can be made useful to some extent if they can be supervised and guided by an able and trained 'nayak'. If that is not so, and the 'nayak' does not know how to guide, the battle would be a wash–out. Also if 'chata' is read as 'cheta', then the 'nayak' may mean the most important character or the hero of the drama. In a drama, people belonging to the categories of 'cheta', 'bita', 'bidusaka' and 'bhata' normally help to negotiate between the hero and the heroine. If the 'nayak' is a fool, he will not be able to understand the signs and gestures of 'cheta' and hence all the efforts of the latter to materialize the desired union will not succeed. Among all these variant meanings of *murkha nayak chata* the meaning of the master and the servant appears to be most plausible. Because there are many couplets in the book that support this meaning of the master and the servant. Elsewhere, in his **Jagamohan Chhanda**, the poet speaks with the same dissatisfaction, that there is nothing more dangerous than flattering a fool. The poet experienced this frequently in his life, and yet, to earn his bread, he had to do this most unpleasant work most unwillingly".

Dr. Sahoo's analysis has not only sharpness and intelligence but also insight. At the same time it is based on a strong reasonableness which should be an essential virtue with a critic who deals with ancient literature where the supporting materials are meagre. A similarly interesting example is seen in his exposition of contemporary social habits through accounts of ornaments given in **Rasakollol**, that were variously used by Lord Jagannath (of Puri), or Sri Krishna, or even by a woman of position. Thus Lord Jagannath uses 'dibyachula' on the head, 'rahurekha' on the forehead, 'makarakundala in the ears, 'kaustuvamoni', 'sardula nakha' and 'kanthimala' etc. round the neck, 'kachati' and 'bahuti' in the arms, and 'kinkini' and 'odiani' round the waist. Also women, who are very

fond of ornaments, use 'jhilimili' and 'jholakmali' in the forehead, 'tatanka' and 'bhramariphula' in the ears, 'moti' or 'motimoni' on the nose, 'nakhyatramala' round the neck, 'kanchimala' round the waist, 'tada', 'chudi', 'katak' etc. in the hands, 'kankan' in the arms, and 'hansak', 'pahuda', 'nupur' etc. in the feet. These are only a few from a much longer list of such ornaments that Dr. Sahoo makes out from **Rasakallol**. The point is, the whole account conjures up a time and a living which is almost lost today, from the present day Oriya life and social habits. That is Dr. Sahoo's forte as a critic. His **Kahe Krushna Das Kabi** apart from being a critical analysis of an important Oriya classic, slowly leads readers to an awareness of living and manners, and to a warmth of humanity, which is rarely done by academic, scholarly books.

(iii)

In fact the book on **Rasakallol** opened the flood–gates. Then began the heady journey which only got a temporary reprieve with the retirement. During a period of about 15 years (from about 1975 till about 1989) Dr. Sahoo wrote hundreds of critical pieces and edited a large number of books by ancient authors, often from palm leaf sources, including such monumantal works as Sarala's **Mahabharat** and Jagannath's **Bhagabat** (16th century). In addition, he planned and supervised and in many cases to the extent of working it out himself, the research work of about 100 scholars, for their M.Phil and Ph.D. degrees, almost all working on either ancient classics or on different aspects of ancient Oriya literature. The speed and the involvement on the one hand, and the complete control over whatever work he was doing on the other, astonished whosoever came in contact with Dr. Sahoo during this period.

It was mostly ancient Oriya literature which got Dr. Sahoo's undivided attention, and rightly, because there had been very few scholars who had seriously worked in this area that far, which may be because of the difficult nature of the work involved. Though Sarala Das is generally assumed to be the first most important Oriya poet, and Oriya literature to have begun from around the 15th century, yet there was a semi–dark

zone prior to Sarala, for about 200 years, a time of formulations and anticipations, when though minor, yet interesting works were produced prior to the great work of Sarala Das. Dr. Sahoo's work begins from that time onwards and to get a clear idea of the work done, it would be convenient to divide his critical and scholarly work chronologically as per periods. The first is pre–Sarala, the 13th and 14th centuries; the second, Sarala himself and his contemporaries; the third relates to writers of later 15th and early 16th centuries particularly the 'Panchasakha' writers such as Balaram, Jagannath and Achyuta etc; the fourth to 16th and 17th century writers of kavyas and lyrics such as Narasingha Sena, Vishnu Das, Raghu Arakhita and Rasananda Nabaghana Chand; and the fifth relates to the later 17th and 18th century major poets, such as Dinakrushna, Upendrabhanja and Abhimanyu, and a general discussion of medieval Oriya literature, that is, Oriya literature of the 17th and 18th centuries ; and the last, 19th century authors and issues, spelling over to early and mid 20th century.

The above is an estimation of Dr. Sahoo's range. What is of importance is its quality and understanding. Thus talking of the 13th and 14th centuries Dr. Sahoo points out the period's many social as well as religious cross–currents in a pan–Indian context, against which the particular significance of at least three interesting works of the time, **Sisuveda**, **Amarakosa** and **Saptanga** have been assessed. This is a difficult period when the conclusions are to be based more on possibilities and suppositions than on real proven documents, and a scholar has to be wary of his views and opinions. In view of this Dr. Sahoo's critical approaches can be seen from a few extracts. In the extracts the purpose has been to specify the timing of, first of all, **Sisuveda**, and secondly of **Amarakosa**, But the approaches are different. First, **Sisuveda** – "First, 'Sunya', Swayambhu, Sribatsa, and the tradition of Ananta Das may be examined in connection with the **Sisuveda**. As we know Ananta Das or Sisu Ananta was a poet of the 16th century. But as the **Sisuveda** has been mentioned in Sarala's **Mahabharat**, it would be reasonable to assume that its writer should belong to a time prior to Sarala. Hence Ananta Das of Panchasakha fame (time, 16th century) cannot be the writer of the **Sisuveda**. Similarly if Swayambhu and Sribatsa are seen independently, this Swayambhu is probably the writer of Prakit work

Param Chariu, and Sribakhya or Sribatsa was probably Bachha Das, the writer of **Kalasa Chautisa**, prior to Sarala. And 'Sunya' was the only intermediary way between the quarrels of the religious communities connected with Shiva and Brahma. The reasons for connecting these with **Sisuveda** are then, ancientness on the one hand, and their wide currency on the other.... A lot of rational and irrational explorations have been made to locate the writer of **Sisuveda**. But it has not been possible to come to any definite conclusion. An equal mystery is the discussion related to the timing of **Sisuveda**. The scholars have ascertained the timing of **Baudha Gan O Doha** to be between the 7th and the 12th centuries. The language, particularly the rhyming structure of **Sisuveda**, closely imitates the former. Therefore it is presumed that it might have been written either in the 13th century or may be immediately after it. The Siddhas mentioned in the book were such as Matsendra, Gorekh and Chaurangi, all of whom either belonged to the 10th or a century earlier to that. There has been no reference in the book of any Siddha who lived after the 10th century. Therefore one may even take the timing of **Sisuveda** to be either 11th or 12th century. On the other hand because of its references in Sarala's **Mahabharat**, which belonged to the 15th century, it may be assumed that it was written either in the 14th century, or at a time earlier to that. Therefore in the absence of any conclusive evidence it would be safe to assume that the timing of **Sisuveda** would be somewhere between the 11th and 14th century"... Secondly, **Amarakosa** – "To get an idea of the time of the composition of **Amarakosa** its language is the only proof. As regards the usage, in the place of 'Ku'-ending, 'Kai'-ending has been plentifully used. Some examples :- 'jekai', 'padakai', 'uparakai', 'tahinrakai', 'tahinratarakai', 'pachakai', 'tatakai', 'takai' etc., or even such ancient uses as 'pindakai', 'bhikhyakai', etc. Similarly 'ka'-ending, such as 'padilaka', 'debaka', 'dhyailaka', 'bhagilaka' etc. or, 'ee'-ending, such as 'marnaee', 'kalaee', 'tahaee', 'ujanaee' etc. Also in plural 'nta'-ending, such as :- 'debinta', 'vedasahasra manta', etc. Even 'si'-ending is there, such as :- 'janithasi', 'thasi', 'sunasi', etc. Besides there are many other ancient uses such as 'bhainsati', 'pibanti', 'duhinti', 'bhua', 'mae', 'nuarai', 'upalesa', 'uchhamana', 'bai', 'tale', 'pekhila', 'chati', 'gaban', 'hathia', etc. Of course these ancient uses do not specify any particular time. Yet whatever

evidences related to language and language–use have gone to ascertain Sarala's **Mahabharat** as belonging to the 15th century the same evidences can establish the timing of **Amarakosa** to be the same 15th. Its rhyming structure is like Sarala's epic – sometime very short, sometime too long. Also in spite of the rhyming pattern there are many portions that do not conform to any rhyme. On the whole **Amarakosa** was a significant composition of the early period of Oriya literature".

Dr. Sahoo's critical tone, it may be pointed out, is never high-pitched, and his critical approach has always a quiet balance about it, that judges both pros and cons of a problem. But when it comes to any conclusion, it is strong and steady. Particularly, one may note, the flexibility of Dr. Sahoo's approach even to similar problems – the purpose being to derive maximum benefit from the materials available in a particular context. An approximation of the timing as related to ancient texts and authors is one such problem. There are other problems too, such as, a discussion of contemporary social or socio-cultural conditions as well as innumerable cross-currents of religion or religious beliefs that used to motivate the consciousness of almost all ancient authors. Often such discussions are confined to the particular area in view, where Dr. Sahoo goes into all possible details. But whenever such discussions give rise to important peripheral conclusions, he never fails to take advantage of that.

A good example is **Rudra Sudhanidhi**, an early 16th century prose text, a long fictional story, by one Abadhutananda Narayana Swami. Dr. Sahoo's article on **Rudra Sudhanidhi**, is probably one of his best critical pieces – a fine example of his probity, balance, understanding and insight. First he refers to its timing – collates the views of earlier scholars, lists references to contemporary authors and books in the text, probes into its language, and comes to the conclusion that it is likely to have been written between 1473 and 1550. In the second part of the article attention shifts to other aspects – an analysis of the content, a discussion of religious beliefs one comes across in **Rudra Sudhanidhi**, a study of its motivations and attitudes, and the work as a potent influence on the major trends to emerge in Oriya literature subsequently. And after all these analyses and discussions, as a fall-out, almost peripherally, one is led back to rethink about its timing and to come to an almost

definite conclusion that its timing cannot be other than early 16th century. Dr. Sahoo's analysis of **Rudra Sudhanidhi's** structure is masterly. It provides perception and insight – it illuminates. One wonders whether **Rudra Sudhanidhi** is an isolated work in early 16th century Orissa, or it transcends time and place, and belongs to that strong tradition, where the emphasis is on universal human perception of life's strength, vitality and richness, and where at one end we have such a great work as Dante's **Divine Comedy**, and at the other, Eliot's **Four Quartets**.

(iv)

Dr. Sahoo's two comprehensive introductions to Sarala Das, one to his edition of Sarala's **Mahabharat (Adi Parba)** and the other to his edition of Sarala's **Chandi Purana**, together running to about 210 pages, provide his essential attitudes towards Sarala's poetry as a whole. What characterizes Dr. Sahoo's discussions are again, his range, balance, and a capacity to probe into the basic humaneness and livingness of a past author. This is how he speaks of Sarala Das in a general way – a precise, perceptive introduction: "Though earlier to Sarala, there used to be short compositions by Siddhas, Nathas and people belonging to various religious cults, as well as saws, proverbs, riddles and sayings by 'Daka' rishis, all of which contributed towards giving an earlier shape to Oriya language, yet it was Sarala Das who stood out as the first great epic poet of Oriya literature. Not the delightful, soft rays of the morning sun, but the fierce beams of the sun at the meridian, that all on a sudden lighted Oriya literature. It did not evolve towards maturity, but it began with maturity, and the model which Sarala finally carved in language, emotion and creative expression, went beyond his times, to remain as an ideal for innumerable subsequent generations".

In a more specific way, though still in a general vein, he speaks of religious faiths, and particularly how Sarala used to interpret religion or what he understood to be 'dharma': "Sarala Das in his **Mahabharat** has not spoken of 'dharma' from any sectarian angle. On the other hand, like Buddhadev he called man's behaviour and habits as 'dharma'. 'Dharma' for him lay in penances, fasting, visits to the places of pilgrimage, sea–bathing, listening to scriptures, as well as in obeying

parents, teachers, and in giving up anger, envy, lust – on the whole pursuing a life of devotion and truth..... Even though Sarala has not distinctly spoken of the common man's 'dharma', yet he has generally advised people to live in 'dharma' and to guide oneself as per tenets of 'dharma'. Therefore as a form of blessing **Mahabharat** mentions such wishes as, 'Let dharma increase', 'Please stick to dharma', 'Let days be spent in learning given to dharma".

In this connection we can yet move on to another passage which is still more specific as related to certain specific issues and where the generalizations can be seen only peripherally as an almost invisible support to the total argument : "Only a good poet knows how to use rhyme appropriately. As only a movement of limbs is not dance, similarly only a use of different musical modes do not make a piece musical. The distinction of any use of rhyme or rhyming pattern lies to what extent it can add spur to language and make the emotion alive and vital.. At least from the way Sarala handled his rhyme it can be presumed that he knew its specific distinction. In his **Mahabharat** he mentions 36 modes of music, including 'malab', 'lalit', 'basant', 'bhairabi' etc. It could have been easy on his part to take up any one of these as the dominant mode of his work. He did not do that. Because he knew that they were only various modes of music, they were not always appropriate when one wanted to say about something specific. Therefore he chose a rhythmic mode which could be used both descriptively and narratively and also in conjunction with prose, and that was 'dandak' or 'dandi brutta' which he took as the dominant form of his **Mahabharat**. The choice of this particular rhythmic mode by Sarala also influenced the poets who came after him, such as Balaram Das and Baranidhi Das. Even in Bengali literature, poets like Chandi Das and Manik Dutta, who belived in narration as the prime virtue of poetry, chose this 'brutta' for their work... The point is, the poet's purpose to free his narration and description as much as he could, without putting on a rigid discipline of a rhyming structure on the language, was largely fulfilled with the support of this 'brutta'."

The passages once again show the fundamental good spirit that generally permits Dr. Sahoo's critical approaches. Apart from what we have earlier noted – a sense of balance – there is often always a

collaborative instinct, like a helping hand often extended to the readers. In his introductions to the respective volumes, that is, the **Mahabharat** and the **Chandipuran**, he has discussed both the works in detail, both structurally and texturally, in neat clear divisions. What finally emerges is the picture of a powerful, innovative poet who had the courage and competence to work in a local language against all pervading influence of Sanskrit (like Dante and Chaucer, more or less his contemporaries, elsewhere) and who at the same time was intensely aware of his contemporary living conditions which he not only formulated through mythological universals but also provided outspoken interpretation and commentary, while at the same time holding out a distinct significance for the modern mind and the modern spirit.

Probably the earliest and one of the most abiding interests of Dr. Sahoo has been in the Ramayana, and beginning from Balaram's great 16th century epic he has explored many facets of Ramayana tradition in Oriya literature. He not only did his Ph.D. on Balaram's **Ramayana**, but as a sequel to that, collected a large number of palm-leaf manuscripts from all over Orissa, of which he made out 7 groupings and finally prepared the definitive edition of **Jagamohan Ramayana**, a work, as I have pointed out earlier, of equal dimension in comparison to the edition of Sarala's **Mahabharat**, done by late Prof. Artaballav Mohanty. In addition, Dr. Sahoo has also edited a few more important books of Balaram Das, such as **Brahmānda Bhugola**, **Uddhaba Geeta** and **Srimad Bhagabat Geeta** from palm leaf sources. But on the whole his emphasis has been on **Jagamohan Ramayana**, the best work of Balaram. In this connection Dr. Sahoo's later critical work on Balaram is a critical biography entitled, **Kavi Balaram Das** (Balaram Das Poet, 1988), a well researched and well–written critical document. Dr. Sahoo's articles on Balaram Das and particularly on **Jagamohan Ramayana** are many, including two exhaustive introductions that he wrote to the published volumes of **Jagamohan Ramayana**. These writings have a number of aspects. First of all, they go to establish some basic data, such as the poet's family, place, etc. along with a correct list of books written by him. Secondly, there are references to contemporary religious beliefs, which are not only incorporated in Balaram's works, but which essentially shaped his thoughts and enriched his poetic personality.

Thirdly, they project Balaram's works as comprehensive social documents. It is particularly interesting, as the 16th century in Orissa was a time of important socio–political changes and in a way it posed a lot of challenge to sensitive human spirit. Balaram's poetry both registered the changes and at the same time provided an insight into the climate of change. Fourthly, they provide a structural discussions of Balaram's works particularly of **Jagamohan Ramayana**, with special emphasis on his use of language. Balaram loved to tell a story, which he did plentifully in his **Ramayana**. Hence the emphasis on narrative aspect and the skill of narration. But he also liked to describe a scene, or a situation, or to delineate a character as keenly and acutely as he could. Dr. Sahoo pin–points these aspects and points out the poet's immense ability, both generally and locally, with reference to the scene or situation in hand, both in its narrative as well as descriptive aspects. A special discussion is due to Balaram's use of language, particularly the ease and suppleness with which he could exploit the rich store of contemporary colloquial speech, and in which he has often been compared with Sarala Das. Lastly, Dr. Sahoo has been able to draw the attention of serious readers to a new, and hitherto unexplored dimension of **Jagamohan Ramayana**, that is, its very interesting link with respect to sequences of story and portrayal of characters etc. with the Ramayana tradition of South–East Asia, particularly, Thailand and Indonesia. Of course the cultural influence of Ramayana did extend from India to the countries in South–East Asia. But Dr. Sahoo's explorations show to what extent Oriya Ramayana tradition proved a potent factor in the growth of such tradition in those countries across the sea.

In fact, Dr. Sahoo's abiding interest in Ramayana has added a special jest and keenness to his such discussions generally and has provided a body of criticism which is both sensitive and specially relevant from the modern point of view. Probably one or two extracts would be useful in this context. The first one is an assessment of Balaram's personality and shows the poet's attitudes towards his contemporary social conditions – "A way of assessing Balaram's personality is to examine his attitudes towards the society. Wherever he has not agreed with the social manners, or wherever he has seen flaws and weaknesses in the society, he has eloquently expressed himself like a revolutionary. Of

many categories of people in the society he has been particularly harsh about two. One is the community of scholars, people learned about Sastras. Even without knowing the real nature of dharma, they always vent their so called scholarship through whatever book–learning they have acquired. Not humility but pride was what they flaunted. The other equally diseased group was where people took up various social masks to get themselves established and make themselves important. Such people included the Vaishnavas who prided on their rituals, the ascetics who exploited their penances and the devotees who were drowned in the glory of their own devotion".

The second extract is technical in nature – a discussion of the rhyming structure used by Balaram Das : "Like Sarala, Balaram Das, used 'dandi brutta' in his **Ramayana**. Probably this was the best medium at that time for a poetic discourse. But on examination one may note that it was not the same 'dandi brutta' that both used. The elasticity that one finds in Balaram's 'dandi brutta' is not to be found in Sarala. This is in many respects closer to a 14-letter 'brutta'. Its elasticity is confined within 11 to 15 letters. Most of the lines contain 13 letters. It becomes a 14–letter unit only by an addition of *je*. On scrutiny one may come to the conclusion that it was so probably because he was eager to make his rhymes more musical. It was an influence of the age– an anticipation of the coming age of songs. As the popularity of Vaishnavism grew, the sweet, musical pieces of Jayadev, Vidyapati and Chandidas influenced the Indian literature as a whole. Balaram was a Vaishnav. He used to worship Lord Jagannath as Rama and Krishna. For these reasons sweet musical words became a part of his writings. In following the traditional practice he took words from many sources–pre-Sanskrit, Sanskrit and local colloquial words. Yet in his selection of words and use of language he was distinctly different from Sarala...."

As before, and once again, Dr. Sahoo's balance, understanding and critical insight can be seen from the above extracts. The same qualities are also evident when we come to examine his discussions on important medieval poets such as Upendra Bhanja and Abhimanyu Samant Singhar, both belonging to the 18th century.

Dr. Sahoo's **Madhyakalin Sahitya** (Medieval Literature), published

in 1983, contained 4 articles on Upendra Bhanja and another 4 on Abhimanyu, a total of about 90 pages for both. Upendra was a major poet, not only in the 18th century, but in Oriya literature as a whole, and there have been frequent discussions about the qualities of his poetry. Dr. Sahoo's discussions highlighted three aspects of Upendra Bhanja's poetry, and everywhere he had something new to say. They related to, 1) the evolution of Rama Katha in Upendra, 2) the influence of Sufi thought on Upendra, and 3) Upendra Bhanja as an aesthetician. In tracing the evolution of Rama Katha in Upendra's famous kavya **Baidehisa Bilasa** (The Story of Vaidehi) he points out how closely Upendra followed Balaram's **Jagamohan Ramayana**. **Baidehisa Bilasa** is indirectly **Jagamohan Ramayana** in kavya form, he says. But there is a difference, and he is quite explicit about it – "As most of the medieval poets were involved with the local royal families, love and indulgences in love and luxury used to be the main content of their poems and kavyas. That is the reason why Upendra Bhanja gave up the devotional and worshipful atmosphere of **Jagamohan Ramayana** and put emphasis on the indulgences of love between Rama and Sita. His kavya's chief content was a tendency to describe the physical beauty of women and to focus on the physicality of love–union". At the same time there has also been a difference in the use of language, he points out. Instead of the simple colloquial language of Balaram, Upendra took recourse to highly stylized language and showed an almost unparalleled capacity to manipulate 'alankaras', particularly 'slesa alankara' in his text. All these, Dr. Sahoo concludes, at least show how or to what extent, Upendra could successfully use the contemporary ideas and ways of writing in adding new dimensions to the tradition of Rama Katha in Oriya.

Similarly, the influence of Sufi thought on Upendra was another example how the poet responded to contemporary ideas, Dr. Sahoo points out. He particularly refers to the emotion-related ideas that flowed through Upendra's poetry - "It is natural that a hero or heroine should go through the feelings of agony at the time of separation. Even it is not unnatural to court death at this point. But the poet sees differently. His arguments prove how it is not so much a desire to surrender to death, but a capacity to withstand the conditions of death is what is important in the protagonist. The poets maintain that the sound of thunder in the

rains, the clear moonlight in the autumn, the cold in the winter, and the cuckoo's songs in the spring increase the agonies of the love-lorn lady in separation. But Upendra thinks that, in fact, because of these the lady in love escapes from death. Because as the poison at times works as medicine and cures disease, similarly as the lady swoons due to the booming noise of clouds, she escapes from the agony of love during the rains. In autumn too, as her eyes get filled with tears of separation, she fails to see the moon and escapes from its intimidating effect. In the winter also, the warmth from the fire of separation which the lady feels in her heart, helps her to withstand the cold of winter. And in spring, the noise which the lady makes as she cries, drowns the song of cuckoo and hence she escapes from a sure death. This is the great mercy of god, and hence the hero shows his gratefulness to god and feels immensely happy at his union with the lady. Even though there are indications of the use of 'alankara' having contradictory connotations, yet the wit and imagination they manifest, not only establish Upendra's uniqueness in Oriya literature but also bring him close to Sufi writers who often excelled in this art".

Elaborating these views, Dr. Sahoo again elsewhere points out - "Both the Vaishnavas and Sufis spoke about the course of love. But it is more the love-concept of the Sufi's that the woman is a goddess, influenced Upendra as it influenced many other medieval poets. He could find in it new streams of ideas that fertilized his poetry. While proclaiming the glory of women or describing the beauty of women and establishing women as the greatest wealth of the world, Upendra not only got great delight himself, but also illumined Oriya literature with an unprecedented light" (pp.156,). Referring to Upendra as an aesthetician Dr. Sahoo points out that the poet's ideas about aesthetics of poetry are in fact integrated in his kavyas, though in two separate books **Rasa Panchak** and **Rasa Manjari** having references to Rama and Krishna respectively, he has discussed many of its elements or 'rasa'. In both, the poet's particular emphasis has been on 'srungara rasa', that is, the rasa of love and love – union, and this by itself constituted a newness in Oriya literature, Dr. Sahoo concludes.

As in Upendra Bhanja, so also in Abhimanyu's poetry, Dr. Sahoo goes on to highlight some essential aspects. Thus first he puts

Abhimanyu, who came after Upendra, in the tradition of 'Riti Kavya' and explores the close link between the latter and the former. At the same time Abhimanyu unlike Upendra, dealt with love intimacies of Radha and Krishna in a true Vaishnavite vein, and in a more colloquial style. He however particularly points out the poet's capacity to manipulate words and music, as well as the poet's keen sensitiveness to human beauty, specially the beauty of human face. In addition, he also explores the poet's intimate links with folk tradition, such as with folk songs and tales. This is what Dr. Sahoo says about Abhimanyu's Vaishnavite links – "Abhimanyu acquired excellent competence in the tradition of Riti-Kavya. He spoke out both as a poet and also as a commentator. But in spite of the fact that he belonged to the Riti-Kavya tradition, he was a true Vaishnav at heart. Therefore, even while writing in the tradition of Riti-Kavya, his ideas, emotion, language and style were to a large extent influenced by the philosophy of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, and his poetry was a rich synthesis of the rich qualities of both." (pp. 184,). Elsewhere he speaks of Abhimanyu's skill as a poet, that is, how or to what extent, almost like a master, he could manipulate the sound and music of words, thereby making his poetic structures not only memorable but also immensely sweet and liquid, like the incomparable verses of Jayadev's **Geeta Govinda**. On the whole, Dr. Sahoo's discussions on Abhimanyu as on Upendra Bhanja, not only exhibit his scholarly range and probing intelligence, but also a fine capacity of mind to think deeply in perspective and to react with vigour and sensitiveness to newness and beauty in literature.

Probably no account of Dr. Sahoo would be complete unless it is pointed out how his ranging critical spirit is almost like a creative act. His continuous preoccupation with major Oriya writers apart, this is most evident in his frequent interest in relatively minor writers, many of whom he unearthed for the first time, or could rescue from comparative oblivion and negligence. Such poets were, Nrusingha Sena (16th century), Jasobanta Das (16th century), Raghu Arakhita (16th century), Rasananda Nabaghana Chand (17th century) and Krushna Das, Sudarsan Das and Gokul Mandhata (all 18th century) etc., or such minor poets who at different times wrote fine devotional lyrics, though few, on or about Lord Jagannath. As I have already said, Dr. Sahoo's dedication

for all these was a tireless one, and this was seen irrespective of whether he was out to find out the correct text, or to discover a new poet, or to strike a new point of view. For about 45 years his had been like a soul in ecstacy and the immense joy and elation which he communicated to his readers, was only a part of what he himself had felt all the while. Oriya literature has a rich, ancient heritage. But there are few people who have the capacity to project it in its true light. Dr. Sahoo was one such person, and probably the very best. His almost untimely passing away has left a gap in the studies of ancient Oriya literature which may not be filled up for many years to come.

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17

THE CRISIS OF ORIYA LANGUAGE

Language is a medium of communication, probably most effective, and this is what has distinguished man from other God's creatures, and has supported and advanced what has been known as human civilization through centuries. Thus it is not only a method of articulation, it shapes this articulation and gives it a name and substance which man calls his own and proudly puts forth as his mark of identification. It is both the gesture and the sign, and rounds up our little life with meaning and signification. But language is not God's creation, it is man's, probably the most intelligent, and the most need–based creation that man has ever thought of, and though from the beginning it outstripped man and could control him as nothing else could, yet paradoxically, it remains most fragile, most delicate, most sensitive to changes in weather and climate, and unless man continuously exerts himself and puts in his best to sustain it, it is bound to suffer, bound to wither and die, at least bound to be stunted without its natural growth and rich foliage.

This is the problem. Language is an extremely powerful instrument. But its power remains so long they who use it keep it trim, fit and develop it with every turn of event, and sustain it with the best of their ability and imagination. One wonders how many languages there would be now in the world. One may recall the Tower of Babel, when mankind had only one language and one speech. But an intolerant God who was afraid of unity wrought by language, scattered mankind all over the world, and hence instead of one, many languages came. By a rough reckoning the languages today vary between 4000 and 5000, though some experts like to reduce it to 3000, as many of the languages have only few speakers. In fact it has been calculated that only 13 languages are each spoken by more than 50m. people, and in numerical order these are–Chinese, English, Hindustani (that is, Hindi and Urdu), Russian, Spanish, German, Japanese, French, Malay, Bengali, Italian, Portuguese and Arabic, and only about 50 languages have notable literature.

This was not so always. Through centuries countless thousands of languages have perished, and language-death is a common phenomena, particularly in these days of fierce competition for living, when the strength of a language is not guided by how many speakers speak it, but to what extent it can provide opportunities and material affluence to the community. Hence switching over from one language to another is a common occurrence and the reasons vary from political, economic, and cultural to matters of sheer expediency. For example, if we consider only the Indo-European languages which are spoken by about half the world's population such casualties are many and languages that once flourished, and flourished very well, are no more, or at least do not exist with the some old vigour and power. Such languages range from Latin, Gothic, Slavonic, Old Norse, Old English and Middle English, Old High German and Middle High German, and Old Prussian, Old Irish, Cornish etc. to old Persian, Sanskrit, Pali, and Prakrit etc. Even nearer at home, one is amazed to what extent Hindi or Hindustani has swallowed up, or in the process of swallowing up Kanaugi, Bundeli, Brajbhasa, Jatu, Avadhi, Baghe, Chatisgarhi, Bhojpuri, Maithili and Magahi etc. Differently, we may also reflect how largely the Sino-Tibetan and the Austric group of languages in India have accepted and made themselves subservient to either dominant Indo-Aryan or the Dravidian group of languages, at times even to the extent of non existence. What needs to be pointed out is that any language anywhere, whatever may be its range, circle and dimension, is continually faced with the danger of extinction unless it puts forth its strength, almost aggressively, to protect itself. This is so not only with small and weak languages, but also with major, established languages with long literary heritage, unless they have adequate will to survive against adverse situations and sustain themselves with continuous alertness and developmental activities.

This brings us to Oriya language, and to our topic, that is, the crisis it now faces. Oriya is an ancient and major language of Eastern Magadhan group. As a spoken language it is more than thousand-year old, and its literary heritage which is quite substantial and powerful, is about 600 years old. Besides, about 25m. people speak it as their mother tongue and another about 6m. people use it as their most important second language. It is the medium of instruction in the schools and

colleges in Orissa, and the first important language in matters of administration. Thus apparently the language has a solid foundation, and its range and dimension are such which lead one to believe in its apparent invulnerability, and its inclusion in the eight schedule is a pointer to that effect.

This is one side, that which appears to be. But the other side is probably more wearisome, and to know that one has to read between the lines. That is, it is not the invulnerability but the vulnerability which is more important and hence more to be wearied about. Oriya written language (and literature) came to its maturity almost from the beginning, with Sarala Das, at the time of the great emperor Kapilendra Dev, in the 15th century. But the political glory and the general cohesiveness of socio–political conditions came to a quick end in 1568, when Orissa lost its independence. Thereafter, for about 300 years, till almost the end of the 19th century, there was a lot of political–cum–administrative as well as socio-economic instability in Orissa and the time was not very congenial for anything good and substantial to take place. But fortunately, the period had one silver–lining. The administration, whether of the Muslim, the Hindu or even the British had greater interest in affairs other than the language or literature which for them were very much peripheral. It was only after the great famine of 1866, when the British administration came to be largely consolidated in Orissa, that the interested people from other language-groups who tried to take the benefit from the secured administrative set-up, that the attacks were made on Oriya language and literature, first vis-a-vis Bengali, second vis-a-vis Hindi, and lastly vis-a-vis Telugu. That the attacks were repulsed and Oriya language could stand on its own with greater glory and colour, was due to a band of very devoted writers and social activists who liberally used the newly started printing press to bring out as many journals and books as they could, and spread an awareness of pride and confidence. Yes, it was not the administration, but people at large, people who were intelligent, sensitive and confident of themselves, who manifested the will to survive and sustain, and thus saved the language.

More than hundred years have passed now, and one need not elaborate how in the meantime Oriya language and literature have passed through

many vicissitudes and have maintained their own. But the problems today are different, both in nature and dimension. No longer Oriya language is cudgelled by outside neighbours. What matters most is the apathy and indifference of insiders; the will to sustain, survive and develop is missing. At a time when the horizons have shrunk and everything is being globalized and the competition to survive and establish one's own identity has become fiercer, this is particularly unfortunate. This applies in equal measure to people who control the administration as well as such other people who can be called elites, and constitute the thinking and sensitive segment of the population. The area of Oriya language is like a no-man's land, as if it is nobody's business. I will try to elaborate my point of view by making references to three aspects. First to publication, production and marketing etc. of Oriya books, secondly, to promotional activities undertaken towards the spread and development of Oriya, and thirdly, Oriya as the medium of instruction or the subject of study in schools and colleges.

Oriya has only publishers, no distributors. This is in contrast to other languages where distributors always outnumber the publishers. Here the publishers sell their own books in their own shops, and the interested reader has to go to the shops concerned to buy the books. As a result the books remain largely static at one place, the place of publication, which is Cuttack in most cases. Even a book published in Cuttack takes a minimum 6 months to come to Bhubaneswar for display and sell. Libraries are few, and functional libraries are fewer. The situation in Bhubaneswar, the capital city of Orissa, is symbolic of what avails all over Orissa. It has no libraries. The only library it boasts of, that is, the State Library, which has a number of people in its pay-rolls including quite a few trained librarians, is distinguished by its inaction, unintelligence and absolute indifference. It is almost next to impossible to see a new Oriya book or for that matter any important Oriya book, anywhere in Bhubaneswar or even in Cuttack, except the shop of the publisher concerned, where the reader can browse and read the book at his will. Then it is amazing how the number of publishers has hardly increased from what it was, say, 40 years ago, in the fifties. There used to be 8 or 10 relatively important publishers then, and they continue to be so even now, and the additions have been few and far between and

largely of minor nature. The consequences are depressing. First of all, a large number of authors, particularly the new authors, and even senior authors who do not have official status, find it very difficult to get their books published. Secondly, the hibernating period for a book received by the publisher ranges from 3 to 5 years, even more, depending on the convenience of the publisher concerned. Thirdly, the books when published are hardly advertised, and hence, the knowledge about a new book is never easily disseminated. Fourthly at times, the author concerned has to partly subsidize the publication of his own book. And lastly, due to this situation, the authors are compelled to publish their own books - almost a unique phenomena in the whole of India. By a rough estimate, about 60% of the books published annually in Oriya, are published by the writers themselves either in their own names, or in the names of small publishers set up for this purpose. This, in addition to the fact that books once printed, however important they may be, hardly go for a reprint, and innumerable authors, whether of the past or of the present, exist only in names, and their books are nowhere to be found, neither in the market, nor in the libraries, which of course do not exist.

An important factor to be mentioned in this connection is the number of Oriya books published annually. A calculation based on the publications of the last 10 years shows, on the average, the number to be around 600, which includes all types of books, and the serious or relatively more serious books will not be more than 10% of this number. Secondly, the quality of production of most of these books is not satisfactory. Except a few, most of the publishers are blissfully unaware of the immense advances in technology that have taken over the world of book-production all the world over. It is forgotten that the production factor of a book is as important as its contents factor, probably more important, because the first look of a book conveys its grace and beauty and is very much relevant at least from the trade aspect. Leaving aside the wonderfully produced books that come to us in English language, ranging from 200 pages to 2000 pages, both in paperback and hard bound editions, even if we look at our next-door neighbour, that is Bengali, it is surprising the height of production they have achieved and the extent to which they have appropriated the modern technology in matters of production. One wonders when it would be possible for

Oriya books to achieve that break-through.

It may be repeated once again that the number of publications in Oriya yearly is hardly a number for a major language which is spoken by above 30m. people. It is probably the lowest among the major languages of India. It would be probably preposterous to compare with English, though that should be the yard-stick for any language anywhere. The traditional publishers in English are currently being replaced by corporations which acquire them and declare their interest as information and entertainment. They see books as one package whose content can be marketed and sold alongside videos, films, T.V.(both terrestrial and satellite), compact disks, databases, computer games, and the like. In fact, currently only British publishing, apart from English publication as a whole in the English speaking world, has become such a large and sophisticated industry that it annually produces over Rs. 54,000 crores turnover and publishes more than 70,000 new titles and new editions on every imaginable subject. As can be seen there cannot be any comparison between Oriya and English, because a comparison between a molehill and a mountain is not feasible. But there is nothing wrong if we set that as a target to follow, let it not be forgotten to our own advantage, and adopt clear courses of action to utilize the immense resources of English to our own benefit.

Publishing is a total activity, that is, it is related to all types of human activities, both physical and mental. It would be exciting to look at the categories of publications of a major and popular publishing house, say, for example, the Penguins, which have more than 60 categories, and cater to all types of need and taste. In contrast, Oriya books have a dull uniformity, heavily biased towards literature. Thus, it becomes a far cry to have books on such commonplace subjects as economics, philosophy, sociology, politics, social science, law, and gender studies etc., leave aside such technical subjects as natural sciences, engineering, medicine, electronics etc. or such advanced ones such as computer, management, biotechnology, cybernetics or genetic engineering etc. Unless Oriya publications range out and expand their horizons their appeal is bound to be limited and utility extremely marginal

As has been pointed out earlier, there is hardly any distributor in Oriya. This by itself is a constraining factor for Oriya publications which

adversely affects the sales. As is generally known, it takes between 3 to 6 years to sell a thousand copies. There are cases where the books have taken even more than 20 years to sell out. Chakradhar Mahapatra's excellent anthology of Oriya folk songs, or J M. Pattanaik's very competently done **Diamond Dictionary**, or the **Sarala Mahabharat** edited by Prof. Artaballav Mohanty are some apt examples. In contrast, one may recall some early titles of Penguins such as Dorothy L. Sayers's **The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club**, or Mary Webb's **Gone to Earth** that sold 3 million copies each in the first year, or D.H. Lawrence's **Lady Chatterly's Lover** that sold 2m. copies in 6 weeks. In fact, books selling more than a million copies are innumerable in English. Even in Bengalli, there are many books that have sold 60 to 70 thousand copies each. One wonders where will be the position of Oriya in this competition, and how long a sale of one thousand copies in 5 years will sustain this language. This naturally affects the writer's royalty payment. In comparison to the fabulous amounts paid to writers in English – Vikram Seth got Rs. 14m. as advance, for his book **A Suitable Boy** – or even in Bengali, where popular writers get Rs. 2/3 lakhs as their annual royalty, where do Oriya writers figure ? Does a popular Oriya writer get Rs. 30,000 annually ? Or a good writer Rs. 2000 annually ? It is anybody's guess.

These are some of the major aspects of Oriya publishing today. But Oriya language and literature also suffer from other counts. For example, there is no promotional activity worth the name. People, particularly educated people , are by and large indifferent about Oriya language. But the Orissa government is totally indifferent, and the work done towards the promotion of Oriya language and literature by the government is almost negligible, particularly when one considers the long span of about 50 years after Independence. No new project was initiated or supported, no subsidy given, no scouting for new talents or support for new writers, no spread or dissemination of existing heritage. Probably the last substantial project which the government supported was about 40 years ago, when it granted a lakh of rupees towards the editing of **Sarala Mahabharata**. The promotional activities can have many channels. Beginning with academic work related to research and exploration, it goes over to spread and publicity, as well as to translation

and marketing. In a state like Orissa, where one does not have philanthropic endowments, or interested private enterprisers, the responsibility for such acts develops on the goverment supported organizations. Orissa spends about 1600 crores of rupees annually in the Education Department, another about 10 crores for the up-keep of culture, and another about 20 crores for the universities. If just one percent of this huge amount can be spent for promotional activities related to Oriya language and literature, probably in another 10 years time we will have no opportunity to moan as we do now. Leaving aside the English language where such work is done not by the government. but by the institutions, universities and the publishers, even in Indian languages, such as Hindi, Panjabi, Marathi, Kannada, Telugu, Tamil and Bengali etc. the governments have got in a big way. They have set up institutions, language universities and have liberally funded many projects. West Bengal government supported the publication of Tagore's work, funded the dialect survey of West Bengal and supported the preparation of a comprehensive directory of Bengali writers. Tamil University is seriously concerned with the collection and editing of Tamil manuscripts, and Telugu University has undertaken the study of inter-province language groups. The work of the government of India through the Central Institute of Indian Languages as well as through the Regional Language Text Book Bureaus is well known in this regard. What has been done in Orissa ? Thousands of manuscripts and rare palm–leaf manuscripts gather dust waiting to be documented and published. There is no worthwhile dictionary, no reference book, no directory of writers, no language survey, no history of literature or language, no system to make the important writers available to readers, no way where outside ideas can come in or inside ideas can move out. In fact, the list would be longer, much longer. But there is where we are. How can one expect the language and literature to survive these adverse situations ?

Related to all these, and in an intimate way, is how Oriya is taught in the schools and colleges. It is surprising to note that Oriya is taught in the model of English, conveniently forgetting that whereas English is taught as the second language, Oriya has to be taught as the first language. The model is not English as it is here, but English as it is in the schools and colleges of English speaking people, where English is the

mother tongue, the first language. Only then a subject like Oriya will draw the best talent and will demand the best of a student, not as on today, indifferently taught, indifferently read and indifferently pursued as an intellectual activity. The foundations for Oriya language and literature are created in schools, colleges and the universities. A reorganization of teaching and learning in such places will go a long way to provide the necessary grit to the development of Oriya language and literature.

One past government's decision may be recalled at this point which has almost a direct bearing with the lessening of language standard in the schools. This was the decision made some years ago that grouped the languages, that is, English, Oriya and Hindi/Sanskrit, in a group where the total marks for the languages was reduced, as also the pass mark for each. The result was a lessening of competence in languages so much so that a student becomes almost a non-starter in languages at the time he passes his Matriculation examinations, whereas a student at the post-Matric stage about 40 years ago had almost a 2000-word vocabulary in English, and even better stock in Oriya. Today it would be fortunate if an average student has 300-word vocabulary in English and an averagely good competence in Oriya. As a result, there has been a lot of proliferation of the so called 'English medium schools' almost everywhere, and a large segment of bright students are being allured by them. This was hardly the case earlier when the best students used to come from Oriya medium schools and that too, largely from mofussil schools. One thing may be remembered in this connection, that competence in languages is always complementary, that is, the competence in one language supports the competence in another language, provided equal attention is paid to both. That used to be the case in Orissa in the near past, when a fine balance was sought to be maintained between English and Oriya so much so, that there was a time when scores of Oriya youngsters could qualify in all India competitions every year. This is no longer the case, because that fine balance is no more. The Oriya youngsters today are weak both in English and Oriya. This does not affect English at all, but this affects Oriya, and what we have been discussing, that is, the continuance and the viability of Oriya language in future.

We have seen how language is an effective medium of communication. But that is only one level, at which the language becomes a functional item. There are about 1600 languages in India, many of which operate only at this level, effecting communication between a man and another. At the second level, it extends to the community where it fosters oneness of the community, at which level it reflects the thoughts and desires as well as dreams and imagination of the community. At the same time it also provides a pride and belongingness to the community, a cementing factor in spite of all odds. Differently, and that is the third level, it also provokes intimacy – intimacy of understanding, which is deeper than its functional use, and also cuts across, if need be, the community link. At this point the language becomes more than language, it assumes a psychological aura and sends out necessary vibrations to that effect. At the last level, the language becomes a living organic unit, something more than physical, psychological and social. It almost becomes, one may say, spiritual, and it gives a shape not only to thought and imagination, but also to understanding and experience. In reflecting the sentient being it becomes another object of sentience.

Probably, I am dilating. But this is necessary to understand what power and strength language carries and how it can be formulated to overcome the crisis. The crisis is fourfold – physical, socio–economic, psychological and spiritual, and to survive and sustain oneself the crisis has to be faced on all fronts. An understanding of the crisis of Oriya language involves an understanding of all these aspects. That is why, in comparison to the crisis it faced a hundred years ago, today's is much deeper, more serious. The earlier was an attack from the outside, a purely physical level, and one knew how to defend oneself. Today it is a disintegration from inside, where all the facets, from physical to spiritual, are involved, and what it demands is a total involvement, a total dedication, a total putting forth of the will to survive. To that extent a failure is a total extinction. Let us hope it can be avoided.

[Paper read at a Seminar in Bhubaneswar, 1997]

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INDEX

(Original Oriya Pronunciation)

Ādibhumi
Jājnaseni
p.48 Sāhādā Sundari
Niyata Basudhā
Mahāmegha
p.49 Sāmrājni
Darpita Āgama
Jāni n thili ta
p.51 Barsāra Balākā
Belābhumi
Rādhā
Maru Jharanā
Nadi O Naukā
Tarā Phutibāra Belā
Bastisārā Soka
Rāgabehāga
p.52 Madhyarātrira Kabitā
Bhangā Āinā
Sikhā Patang
Bāgdatta
Debadāsi
Dāeri
Ajānatā Adhyāya
Sarāhata
Chhāi Alua
Jharakā
Smihāsana
p.54 Phulaphutā Muhurta
Smruti Srāban Pratibimba
Swāti Lagna
Janharātir Muhan
Ekalā Nadira Gita
Thare Khāli Dākidele
p.56 Surya Sikhā
Andhakārar Ranga
Seemāheen
Jhadar Jhankār
p.57 Durbādala
Mahāmukti
Kācha Jhulanā
Bhijā Gayas
Trunar Trushnā
Abāk Surya
Niraba Nirjyāsa
Surya Snāna
Swetāmbari
Ātmajā
Atyanta Ātmiyatā
Asānta Aparāhna
Ādhārsilā
Silālipi
Purbarāga
Nirabatār Swara
Akuhā Kathā
Bhābaku Nikata
Naba Barsāra Sakāla
Kaschit Kāntā
Kantābāda
Arannya Avisār
Janharāti
Rekhāchitra
Papun Pheri Nāhin
Sukhar Muhānmuhin
Potāsraya
Chhāyāpata
Chhāi Sepākha Manisha
Bhāsākhyara
Durantadisā
Sikhā
Āgāmi
Bālighar
Aneka Sunnyatā
Ārannyak
Nistabda Kolāhala
p.58 Mlāna Dihudi
Swāti
Shyāmala Sugandha
p.63 Mahājātrā
p.64 Darabār
Chilikā
Chandrabhāgā

p.64 Chhāndamālā
Basantagāthā
Utkal Gāthā
Kusumānjali

p.65 Rusiprāne Debābatarana
Chhamāna Āthaguntha
Lachhamā
Māmu

p.66 Bibāsini

p.67 Kalikāla
Budhābara

p.68 Nānābāyāgita

p.69 Abakāsa Chintā
Rāmachandire Rāti O Sakāla

p.70 Kalikā
Ālekhikā
Kālijāi

p.71 Padmapākhudā
Golāpaguchha
Āsā Manjari
Dhauli Pāhāda
Lālikā

p.72 Manenāhin
Mahādipa
Uttarāyan

p.73 Jātrāsangita
Jiban Chintā
Swarājyasrama
Kamalāyan
Mahānadire Jyostnā Vihār

p.74 Smaranikā
Utkalikā

p.76 Pātheya
Bāji Rout
Bhānumatira Desa

p.77 Bhima Bhyān
Padmamāli
Kanakalatā
Tankā Gachha
Bulā Fakir
Sani Saptā
Rupāchudi
Kāli Bohu

p.78 Malā Jahna
Mātira Manisha
Hā Anna
Homa Sikhā
Kanā Māmu

p.80 Bhāibhāga
Shikār

p.81 Oriyā Sāhityar Kramaparinām
Satyabādi
Samāj
BhāgabatTungire Sandhyā
Nanānka Bastāni
Bāi Māhānti Pānji

p.82 Bābāji

p.83 Chasājhia
Kalāpāhād
Bhāta
Abhijān

p.85 Parajā
Amrutar Santān
Mātimatāla

p.87 Samudrasnān
Āscharya Avisār
Kālapurusa
Sandigdha Mrugayā
Sachitra Andhār

p.88 Sāgunā
Sabdar Ākāsh
Samayar Seshanāma
Barsā Sakāla

p.89 Krushnachudā
Mahā Nirvāna
Bhangā Khelanā
Ghar Bāhudā
Thākura Ghara
Nāli Gulu Gulu Sādhab Bohu

p.90 Samudrar Khyudā
Bisakanyāra Kāhāni
Ābu Purusa O Annyānya Kāhāni

p.91 Nandikā Kesari
Bitarkita Aparānha

p.92 Bisād Eka Rutu
Nai Ārarapāri
Chandan Banare Ekā
Darpana Āgare
Ātmanepadi
Naipahanrā
Andha Mahumāchhi

Dwā Suparnā
Manikarnikā
Je Jāhār Nirjanatā

p.93 Chahalā Chhāire Ghadie

p.86 Gaun Debatā
Jajāti
Annyā

p.94 Asamāpikā
Sunnyatār Sosha
Sāhādā Sundari

p.95 Mānchitra
Priyatamā
Māyā Darpan
Bisād Yoga
Sabari Charyā
Chhāyādarsan
Akhyarna Debatā
Chahāni Mandap
Sabda Ekā Ekā Ekatra
Darpana Silā

p.96 Ālokita Banabāsa
Mantrapāth

p.97 Egāratā
Dhalāgāra Kalāgāra
Ākhi Nāi Kānanāi

p.98 Gangā O Gāngi
Gotā Ālu
Mitralāva
Heresā
Sāhitya Chāsa
Sālagrām
Nisāna Khunta
Rānuapā Thāru Pusijāye

p.99 Michha Bāgha
Andha Rātir Surya
Annya Rupa Rupāntara
Jhadar Eagal O Dharanira Krushnasār

p.100 Tarā O Timir
Samrāt O Annyānya Galpa
Aswārohir Galpa
Mo Galpar Nāyak
Nilāchalaku Rāstā
Bandhyā Gāndhāri
Bichitra Barnā

p.101 Sāsti

p.102 Hidamāti
Bhangāhāda
Hā re Durbhāgā Desa
Se Mari Nāhin
Ālua Pāin
Amadābāta
Chalābāta

p.103 Asānta Aranya
Rājdhānir Ranga
Ei Gān Ei Māti
Chapalchhandā
Sultānā
Rāga Anurāge
Bandi Jājābar

p.104 Satlejru Jirā
Banamālati
Mahānadira Dheu
Jagannāth Swāmi

p.105 Bharasā
Sankhāsindura
Muliā
Gharasansār
Bhāibhāuja
Sāipadisā
Mānikajodi
Sāānta Ghara
Jayamālya

p.106 Sababāhaka Māne
Tata Niranjanā
Nālipāna RāniOKalāpān Tikā
Mrugayā

p.107 Mu Āmbhe O Āmbhemāne
Dhrutarāstrar Ākhi
Mahānātak
Mānsara Phula
Banhimān
Jiban Vidyālaya
Silā O Sālagrām
Achyutānanda O Panchasakhā
Odisār Mahimā Dharma

p.108 Debadāsar Drustipāta

p.109 Hātabazārar Brhmajnān
Gnānmandal
Sahābsthān

p.116 Rama Bibhā

p.117 Raghunāth Bilās


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